

Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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BANDWAGON

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

Circus historians across America suffered a great loss with the passing of Robert Lewis Parkinson on March 7, 1991. He established the Circus World Museum research library, organizing and filing its holdings which allowed quick access for those seeking information on any phase of the circus. For many years he has been a direct and indirect contributor to the *Bandwagon*. His help over the years was greatly appreciated.

The *Bandwagon* is honored to place Bob Parkinson on the cover of this issue. Photo from the Circus World Museum collection.

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NEW CHS SECRETARY

Following five years of efficient service to the Circus Historical Society as secretary-treasurer Mrs. Johann W. Dahlinger has resigned that office.

The CHS is most appreciative of Mrs. Dahlinger's contribution to the organization.

AVAILABLE BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

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On April 1, 1991 CHS President John Polacsek appointed Dale C. Haynes to fill her unexpired term as secretary-treasurer of the Circus Historical Society.

Haynes has been a CHS member for over 33 years. He resides in Westerville, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus.

1991 CHS CONVENTION DATE CHANGE

The dates of the convention have been changed to May 24 to May 26. The meeting will start one day later than originally scheduled. We have just been informed that the Circus Flora performance will be on Sunday 26.

Please reconfirm your scheduled room and flight dates. Memorial Day is Monday May 27, allowing travel time on the day after the meeting.

The convention will be headquartered at the Holiday Inn Riverview, 301 Savannah Highway, Charleston, South Carolina 29407, phone 803-556-7100. The ho-

tel is aware of the date change and we will have the same room rates on Sunday night. If you have any problems call John Polacsek, convention chairman, at 313-885-7957.

DUES NOTICES MAILED

CHS dues and subscription notices will be mailed in April. Please do not mail your payment until you receive your notice.

If your payment is not received by July 1, 1991, the July-August *Bandwagon* will not be mailed.

Due to increased postage charges the dues and subscription charge is now \$18.00 in the United States and \$21.00 outside the U.S.

Individuals can show their support for the CHS by becoming Sustaining, Contributing and Concessionaires members by paying \$25, \$50 or \$100, rather than the standard rate of \$18. Over 200 sent the extra amounts last year.



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The Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, owned by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and operated by Historic Sites Foundation, Inc., is seeking a person to oversee the world's largest circus history research facility. The position requires: BA or BS degree, administrative skills, American history or circus background.

Library science or computer knowledge is helpful, but not required. Salary range is \$32,000 to \$38,000 depending on qualifications and experience. Applications must be received by May 20, 1991. Position starts early summer 1991. Send resumes with a cover letter to:

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The Great JAMES M. COLE CIRCUS

Part One - The Early Years and 1946

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

James M. Cole operated a circus for over fifty years, longer than any living American showman except D. R. Miller. His James M. Cole Circus toured off and on from 1936 until 1988.

Cole was born in Penn Yan, New York on January 11, 1906. His interest in the circus began at three years of age when he received a box of blocks embellished with pictures of birds and beasts under his family's Christmas tree.

Cole became the youngest circus owner in America with his first circus in 1936. Jimmie, as he is known to his myriad friends, did not fulfil his ambitions to become the youngest circus owner by mere observation and wishful thinking. He started at the bottom of the ladder by handing out programs and assisting back stage at the Sampson Theater in Penn Yan when he was only eleven years old. That job was so well done that on entering high school at fourteen the manager of the theater made him treasurer, which gave him experience he used to great advantage in later years. During the winter seasons many circus people played the theater and Cole's interest in the circus grew.

While on summer vacation from high school he spent the summer of 1925 with Floyd King's Walter L. Main show. This was a grand experience for a boy who had a sawdust objective in life and desired to be proficient in all branches of the circus profession.

In the spring of 1926, Cole graduated from Penn Yan Academy and immediately joined the Main show as assistant treasurer in the office and ticket wagon under the direction of Ralph Woodward, a man whom Cole strongly states was the very

best circus treasurer for a young man to be associated, on account of his honesty, sobriety and interest in those desiring to learn. He remained with the Main show through 1927 and went to the Kings' Gentry Bros. Circus in 1928.

Cole moved to Sells-Floto in 1929 and remained with Peru rail shows through the 1938 season. He was the time keeper and commissary manager on Sells-Floto in 1930. He continued on that show and was superintendent of the commissary its final season of 1932.

Cole learned every angle of the circus business before trying his wings with his own show.

In 1936, at age 30, he was ready to strike out on his own and open the James M. Cole Wild Animal Circus. In January he announced that he had signed Manuel

Bill stand for the 1936 James M. Cole Circus stand in Binghamton, New York. It was not played. Manuel King was featured. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

King, the twelve year old lion trainer, as a feature of his new show.

In February it was reported that Si Semon was to be general agent. Semon was a former agent with Mugivan and Bowers. Cole announced that his show would open in Detroit, Michigan with a ten day engagement and then move to Cleveland, Ohio. Forrest Freeland, press representative of the show, and later a well known lithograph artist, told the *Billboard* that winter quarters would be established in Detroit. A March 21 *Billboard* report stated that the John Robinson and the Adele Nelson elephants would be with the show. Buck Steele was to have the wild west concert. Claude Morris was to be manager of the advance car and Jack Lester was signed as contracting press agent.

The May 2 *Billboard* reported that Cole had leased fifteen railroad cars from the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. Cheerful Gardner and ten elephants were to be part of the deal. It was also reported that Cole had purchased a 150 foot big top with three 50s from Baker-Lockwood. The Detroit date had been scratched and the show was to open in Cleveland's Municipal Stadium. The deal for the railroad equipment later fell through.

On May 1 the ten day Cleveland stand opened and drew a total of 12,000 people. Acts with the show included Manuel King; the Charles Siegrist flying act; Palenberg's bears; John Robinson's elephants; the Hollis riding act; the Six Avalons wire act and the Blondin-Rellims high wire act. Cheerful Gardner was there with a group of Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants. Buck Owens and Buck Steele and their wild west groups were part of the performance.

The show did not draw and closed after four days. Weather and a lack of adequate capital were factors in the early closing. Jimmy Cole's dream as a circus owner was shattered, but he learned from the unsuccessful experience.

When Howard Y. Bary's Hagenbeck-Wallace show opened in 1937 Cole was there as time keeper and paymaster. He returned the following season in the same capacity.

An interview with Cole was published in the March 20, 1938 Penn Yan *Democrat*: "Spring is here. Corroboration of the statement can be had in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. James M. Cole, Main Street, where two happy people are busily arranging details and packing for the big event of the spring--the circus.

"Jimmy and his wife will



close their modest little apartment, pack away their curios gathered from many states on their long trips with the big top of the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, and will start on their long trek Wednesday, March 23. They report to circus headquarters in Peru, Indiana for the work of the coming seven months, as employees of the big show.

"These two people are real 'circus folk.' When they came back to Penn Yan last December, at the close of the circus season, they were glad to meet their friends, but Mrs. Cole, after her one year on the road, didn't like it, and missed the daily life of the circus, with its hustle and bustle and world within a world atmosphere. Jimmy who has had 14 years' experience as a circus man, was more inclined to accept the situation as a mere interlude in the great life of the big top and called on all his old friends. Jimmy is a native of Penn Yan, while Mrs. Cole came from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

"The story of the Coles is interesting. Jimmy has been associated with several circuses in his 12 years of show experiences. Two years ago he began to organize his own circus known as the James M. Cole Wild Animal Circus. The work of organization was completed and the show went on the road, only to have a run of bad breaks and hard luck, which ended in defeat for Jimmy. It was Mrs. Cole's first experience with the big show, and, according to her, was not a pleasing one. She immediately soured on anything and everything 'circusy.' Her husband's health, imperiled by his heart-breaking experience as head of the show which ran into snags at all corners, and their savings sunk in the hands of those whom they had trusted but who had been found wanting, just about filled Mrs. Cole's cup with antagonism for circus life.

"Then," according to Jimmy, 'my chance came for a job with Hagenbeck-Wallace shows. At first Dorothy absolutely refused to hear or talk circus, but finally when I showed her it was a chance to come back and that I loved that kind of work, she gave in.' But it sure was hard work to win. Jimmy signed up as paymaster with the show, with his wife as assistant-paymaster, and, says Jimmy, 'my wife is the first woman in circus history ever to be an assistant paymaster, and the way she has taken hold I guess that in another year she will be paymaster and I will be assistant.'

"Jimmy believes strongly in the good



Dorothy and James Cole on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1937.

luck merits of the trumpeting elephant and has more than sixty specimens ranging in size from tiny thumbnail models to large three pound figures. 'A friend gave me a white elephant trumpeting about a week before I got my chance with Hagenbeck-Wallace and from that time on I picked up every kind of good luck el-

Newspaper ad used for the 1939 Cole indoor show.

ephant I could get,' he said.

"In their work in the paymaster's office Jimmy and Dorothy keep account of the Social Security numbers of all employees. There are approximately 600 employed by the show. They have to keep account of each individual's time, loss of time, and commissary (circus store account). The bookkeeping and accuracy which this entails might put one or two gray hairs in the head of any bank executive. Millions of dollars in cash and checks pass through their hands in one season.

"And so the Coles pack up for the 1938 circus season and leave their Penn Yan apartment for the roll and rattle of the day and night life of the 'big, white tented city.'"

In the fall of 1938 Cole tried again as a circus owner. He knew that he would have to start small and build. During the summer he began making plans for the show which was the inaugural tour of his annual indoor winter circus. With the help of the Penn Yan school superintendent he made contacts with schools throughout the state and a short route was played late in 1938 and early in 1939.

On July 22, 1939 he wrote to Central Show Print, Mason City, Iowa telling them he liked the job they had done on his heralds and that as soon as he could get drawings for newspaper copy he would have them make up mats.

He advertised in the September 9 *Billboard* for acts, a liberty horse act, clowns, an agent, lithographer and banner man.

Cole wrote to F. Robert Saul on September 8: "Replying to your letter I wish to advise that I need an agent who can book my show in schools.

"I have a nice set up and one that will go over providing I keep the nut down and I intend to. I need a good man ahead who I can rely upon to keep the show moving. I myself have had no trouble booking the show.

"If you feel you are capable, please send me lowest salary you will work for.

"Also send me salary the lithographer will work for. He must have his own car. There will be no posting, I want a man that will not waste cards and lithos."

On October 2 Cole wrote W. M. Temple at Central Show Print asking him to send proofs of any mats for newspapers that would be suitable for his indoor show.

The James M. Cole Indoor Circus opened its second season in Penn Yan on October 16, 1939 at the Junior High School and then played Rochester for

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One sheet poster used by the Cole indoor show in 1940.

eight days, showing in four different high schools two days each.

The show was in Endicott, New York on November 3 and 4 where the program included Capt. Allen's liberty horses; Millie May, swinging ladders; De Rizkie troupe, acrobatics; Miss May, muscle grind; Tai-Wan, Chinese juggling and balancing; Small Family, Roman rings; Capt. Allen, roping and whips; De Rizkie, head balancing traps and Arleys, perch act. Clowns were Blinkie Hoffman, Shorty Wave and Zeke Lamont. The acts were presented in a new thirty foot ring curb. Frank De Rizkie was equestrian director and Mike Guy led local high school musicians. The show moved on five trucks.

The 1939 show closed in Suequehanna, Pennsylvania on November 26. Business had been good but the schools were de-

The James M. Cole Circus in Oxford, New York June 10, 1942.



manding a large percentage of the gross. Cole also acknowledged that he had not had a strong enough advance.

In the fall of 1940 Cole was preparing for another tour of indoor school dates. On October 12 he announced the show would open on October 21 at the Penn Yan Junior High School. The staff of the show was to be James M. Cole, owner-manager; Dorothy Cole, secretary-treasurer; Davis S. Cook, agent and manager of the number one advance car; J. S. Smith, lithographer and second agent, No. 2 advertising car; Lou Barton, bannerman; Michael Guy, band director; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Peterson, in charge of concessions, with four assistants; Blackle and Tim Jones, grooms; Mike Carr, Frank Wylie, and Harry Allen, property men.

The show had an air calliope for ballying the town the day of the show. The two advance cars were painted white with gold lettering with clown heads on each door. The ring curb was 30 feet, with a ring mat that was covered with red theater carpet. The circus had a new line of press sheets, mats, and heralds. The Erie Lithographing Company furnished all pictorial paper in half, one and three sheets and the Auslet Poster Company furnished two styles of four-color window cards, panel hangers and one sheets. Three two-ton trucks and three panel trucks were to be used to move the show, besides the autos and living trailers of the performers. Cole planned to have a girl in each town four days ahead to promote ticket sales, work with auspices and speak to school assemblies.

Acts included Creta Brothers and Helene, comedy bar and trampoline; the Four Arleys, head and hand balancing and high perch; Rose Steele, menage and dog

acts; Millie May, ladder and muscle grind and Miachua, general performer.

The 1940 fall tour closed in Manchester, New York on December 12 after nine weeks of excellent business. The show, according to a *Billboard* report, moved on fifteen trucks and private cars. The high school band at each stand furnished the music under the direction of Mike Guy. Cole announced that he would have a show under canvas in 1941. He already had purchased a light plant and a 70 foot big top. It was to be a one ring show or hillbilly unit.

On January 6, 1941 Cole wrote Art Miller about his under canvas show: "Mike Guy wrote you that I had bought the canvas. I told him I planned to as I want to take my show out under canvas, a small one ring show.

"I have to see how the balance of the season goes. If I am well I'll be in position to take it out, otherwise will have to wait another year. I want to this year as people are working and the time is right. I am sure I could do well with the show I have in mind.

"I wish to advise that I am interested in your marquee and the 70 foot top. Please let me know the price.

"If you get up this way stop in and see me. I open February 3 and play the Bath, New York high school the 4th."

The winter tour was resumed on February 3 in Dundee, New York, going into Connecticut late that month. The Aerial Smalls were the only act held over from the fall tour. The program ran an hour and a half and consisted mostly of animal acts.

The Cole cookhouse and truck in Oxford, New York, 1942.



The 1941 canvas tour never materialized in spite of Cole earlier announcement. In August he advertised for acts for a winter tour to open on September 29. The program included Barton's dogs; Miss Marguerita, web and traps; Chief White Eagle, trick shooting; Capt. Rudy with elephant, camel and dogs; Billy Barton, cloud swing; La Form sisters, double traps and the Bartoni riding act.

After playing schools in New York and



Pennsylvania the show went into Ohio and played Canton on December 6. Theater dates were booked at Shea circuit houses in Zanesville, Cambridge, Marietta and Ashtabula where it closed on December 13 and returned to Penn Yan.

1942

The January 24, 1942 *Billboard* reported: "Since arrival of J. M. Cole's indoor circus here in quarters last December work on revamping all equipment has been going on steadily. Captain Rudy Moeller is wintering his elephant, camel, pony and dogs with the show, as is George Barton his bareback horse, ponies and dogs. All were with the unit during its first half of the winter tour.

"James M. Beach, well known agent, has been contracted to pilot the organization and is now booking indoor dates. Plans are being made to put the show under canvas in the spring. It will be transported on twelve show owned trucks and five trailers which have already been delivered. Building of seats and other equipment will be done after the indoor tour. Color scheme will be red, white and blue. The indoor unit will reopen in Dundee, New York February 2.

"James M. Cole circus will close its indoor season on March 24. The outdoor season will open at Penn Yan, New York on May 5. Acts under contract to date are Six Avalons, wire and teeterboard; Barton Family, riders; Marguerette, single traps and web; Billy Barton, cloud swing, and Rudy's elephant, camel, dogs and ponies. C. S. Brooks has been contracted as bandmaster. The show plans to carry a side and a pit show."

Cole advertised in the January 31 *Bill-*

The marquee and ticket wagon of the 1942 Cole show.

board for acts for the outdoor season. He wanted to buy a light plant, blue bleachers and a grandstand and some small tents.

On March 14 Cole played Saugerties, New York under auspices and packed them in for two performances. Fred P. Pitzer reported in the *Billboard*: "The James M. Cole Indoor Circus is a clean, well-regulated trick and showed all that was advertised. George Barton has a trained dog and pony act. His wife pleased with aerial work and riding and Billy Barton, George's son, did a good job on swinging rope which can easily be built into a flash act. Capt. Rudy Moeller, with elephant, camel, dog and pony, furnished interesting routines. There were two clowns and biggest laugh was produced by a mechanic used with kids and pony. Musical director Guy did a splendid piece of work in whipping local band into shape for this stand. Jim Cole is a real showman and will be heard from as time goes on."

The indoor unit closed on March 24 allowing Cole to devote full time to preparing the under canvas show. He placed an ad in the April 4 *Billboard* wanting a general agent, banner man, lithographer, ticket sellers, clowns, lady wrestler and working men in all departments. He also wanted to book a complete side show, kiddie rides and a pit show.

The April 25 *Billboard* reported that work in quarters was about complete. All trucks had been lettered and decorated in

The Cole show on a lot in 1943. The big top is at left and menagerie at right.



silver, red and blue by Blinky Hoffman. The quarters had been open to visitors and 300 arrived on Easter. The staff included James M. Cole, manager; Dorothy H. Cole, treasurer; G. G. Daniels, contracting agent; H. J. Lane brigade boss; George H. Barton superintendent and equestrian director; Lionel Cole, boss mechanic; John Beyea, master of transportation; Charles Mackey, front door; Arkle Williams, superintendent of tickets and Bo Kelley, boss canvasman.

The under canvas show opened in Penn Yan on May 6 under a square end big top that had been formerly used by the John R. Van Arnman rep show. Despite a heavy downpour all day the show did capacity business. The Rudy Moeller elephant, named Jumbo, was a feature. Rain and cold followed the show in every stand but it continued to do good business. In Geneva on May 8 there were two straw houses.

Business was generally good during the short season that ended on July 25 in Canandaigua. The show did not leave New York state during the entire outdoor tour.

The October 24 *Billboard* contained an advertisement for the Cole indoor show, wanting acts for a winter tour of ten weeks. It also offered for sale monkeys, a baboon and a 50 foot top with four 20 foot middles.

1943

The first news of the Cole show came in the January 2 *Billboard* when he announced that he would make another under canvas tour in 1943. Work in quarters was under way with all equipment being painted and repaired. For the fourth consecutive year the show would open its winter season in the Dundee, New York high school on February 1. The outdoor season was to open in Penn Yan on April 28.

On January 28 Cole reported in the *Billboard* that eight weeks of indoor dates had been contracted. Globe Poster Corporation had delivered special paper for the indoor dates. The program was to comprise a variety of animal acts, which would include trained dogs, goats, monkeys and Biehler's Circus Revue, featuring four performing bears. Tim Mix, Jr. and his company of cowboys and cowgirls were under contract. The usual aerial and acrobatic turns would be offered. Blinky Huffman, Zeke LaMont and Frank Provost were to be in clown alley. Music was to be furnished by local school bands. The show would carry eighteen people and be transported on six motorized units.

It opened at Dundee, New York on February 1, followed by Horseheads the next day. Business at both dates showed an in-

crease over previous engagements. Matinees were bigger due to students living out of town attending after studies instead of driving in at night. From attendance it appeared that people were eager for entertainment within walking distance of their homes.

The program included Cole's dogs; Jerry Burrell, trick and fancy roping; the Muse Sisters, novelty entertainers; barnyard performers; Viola Burrell, whip manipulator and Captain Biehler's bears. Clowns were Roy Barnett, Zeke Lamont and George (Patsy) Davis. Jerry Burrell announced the show.

The staff included George Daniels, advance representative; Ray Biehler, animal trainer; James Bagwell, superintendent of concessions; John Beyea, property boss and Ethel Smalley, wardrobe mistress.

Cole announced on April 10 that his circus would open the outdoor season on the fairgrounds at Palmyra, New York on May 6. To conserve gasoline, rubber and wear and tear on rolling stock moves were held to a maximum of forty miles. Cole believed short moves also would aid in getting doors open on time while the show was operating with a shortage of labor.

George G. Daniels returned as contracting agent and H. J. Lane was again in charge of the brigade. H. L. Filbert, who held an executive position with Lee Bros. Circus for several years, had been added to the staff. Concessionaire Larry Marvin was signed. Dorothy Cole was in charge of the office. Tim Mix Jr., singing cowboy, was featured. The show was transported on fourteen show-owned trucks and trailers. A six piece band was carried.

On April 17 Cole reported the purchase of a twenty acre farm three miles east of Penn Yan on April 7. The property, on a state highway, including an eight room house, with all modern conveniences, barns and other buildings which were to be used as a winter quarters for the show. During previous winters the show was stored on the fairgrounds at Penn Yan. The Palmyra, New York fairgrounds were being used as quarters at that time. The

James M. Cole Circus seat truck used during the 1943 season.



Two trailers used by the Cole show during the 1943 season.

circus was to open in Palmyra on May 5. The Coles moved into their new home on April 15.

Cole announced on April 24 that he had contracted Bernice Kelly, wire act; Morris Duo, perch act; J. H. Waterman's performing buffalo and A. Lee Hinckley as band master. Cuban Mack was to be the side show manager.

The 1943 tour began in Palmyra, New York and stayed in that state until entering Pennsylvania on May 14. By the 29th it was back in New York at Westfield.

The circus moved on twelve show owned trucks and had an 80 foot big top with four 35 foot middles. The top seated nine hundred including 350 reserves. The side show top was a 40 with one 30 foot middle. The general admission charge was 55 cents, with 95 cents additional for reserves. The side show charge was 10 cents.

Cuban Mack must have left the show as Cole advertised on May 29 for a side show manager with people, stating he had a new top and banner line. He also wanted a ground act, clowns and musicians.

On June 11 Joe Myers and Charlie Lockier delivered a new stake driver. Bud Anderson joined in Fulton, New York on June 19 with his liberty act and elephant Eva.

On June 30 the show was in Jamestown, New York after which it headed west into Ohio at Conneaut on July 1. Six stands were played in northern Ohio before going into Michigan at Adrian on July 8. The show had three weeks of good business in Michigan before going back to Ohio at Bowling Green on August 2,

where it followed Beers-Barnes by a week. Both shows did good business there. Cole's circus played Delaware, Ohio August 6 where the author first met James M. Cole.

Cole had no luck in booking a side show so Bud Anderson arranged one using the animals and five novelty acts. The show remained in Ohio until August 20 when it went back into Pennsylvania at New Brighton. Cole advertised in the August 21 *Billboard* to purchase an elephant.

The Cole circus played eight stands in Delaware and went into Maryland at Berlin on September 15. Hunt Bros. was playing some of the same towns in Maryland and both shows were getting good business. On September 25 Cole announced his show would close in Hornell, New York on October 9. Penn Yan was to be the October 8 stand.

A season route sheet was published for 1943. The staff listed James M. and Dorothy Cole, owners; James M. Cole, manager; Dorothy Cole, treasurer; Mrs. Bud Anderson, front door superintendent; William Morris, equestrian director; John C. Beyea, transportation superintendent; H. L. Filbert, lot superintendent and Harry Marvin, electrician. George G. Daniels was general agent, and H. J. Lane was press agent and brigade manager. Bud Anderson was side show manager and superintendent of stock.

The band at the end of the season was directed by A. Sica with four musicians.

The program listed in the route sheet was:

1. Capt. Kelly, pony drill.
2. Miss Bernice, wire act.
3. Clowns.
4. Three Hicks from the Sticks, novelty act.
5. Cupid, educated pony.
6. Elephant Eva, presented by Bud Anderson.
7. Concert announcement.
8. Clowns.
9. Bernice Kelly, swinging ladder.
10. Capt. Waterman's trained buffalos.
11. Rex, high diving dog.



12. Second concert announcement.
13. Roy Barnett, featured clown.
14. Bud E. Anderson's liberty horses.
15. Morris Duo, high perch.
16. Pat Kelly dog act.

The concert was presented by Tim Mix, Jr. and his Colorado cowgirls.

Cole planned to take the show out again in 1944 and advertised in the October 30 *Billboard* for acts, clowns, band director, boss canvasman, electrician and cook. He wanted to buy a 70 foot big top with 30 or 40 foot middles, an elephant, dog and pony acts.

The November 20 *Billboard* contained a Cole show advertisement offering for sale a 50 foot top and three 35 foot middles at \$1,000, a 40 by 60 foot side show top for \$350, a 20 by 40 marquee for \$100 and a 20 by 40 cookhouse top for \$100. All canvas was new that year. The ad contained this comment: "Joined the Army. Thank all persons answering ad for the 1944 season. Will place you all when victory is won."

In late October 1943 Cole joined the Army where he served until the fall of 1945.

In the spring of 1944 Cole leased five trucks to Terrell Jacobs for his ill fated circus. The Jacobs show never got out of Peru, Indiana after the opening stand there. The trucks were returned to the Cole quarters in Penn Yan on railroad flat cars in October.

1946

The Post War Show

While James M. Cole was in the service he spent many hours planning every detail of the circus he was to tour after the war.

At age 39 he received his discharge from the Army at Camp Shelby, Mississippi on September 14, 1945.

The first *Billboard* reference to Cole appeared on September 29. He had provided a correspondent in New Orleans with the news on September 22 that the James M. Cole Circus would tour in 1946. The *Billboard* stated: "He will open his show with all new flame-proof canvas from front to back, having already placed the order with United States Tent & Awn-

ing Company. Cole also said he had gathered his old staff which included George Daniels, general agent; H. J. Lane, brigade manager and press; Frank Snyder, transportation superintendent; John Beyea, lighting boss and mechanic. Charlie Lockier was to paint the show."

Cole placed an ad in the November 3 *Billboard* reading: "James M. Cole, America's youngest and most progressive circus owner, having received an honorable discharge after serving two years in the U. S. Army, will reopen The Great James M. Cole Circus indoors April 1946 and then under canvas." A number of available positions were listed, including bosses, workmen and acts. He also wanted to buy animals of all kinds, elephants, horses, ponies, lead stock and caged animals.

The November 17 *Billboard* brought news of Cole's return home and more of his plans for the 1946 season: "James M. Cole, having been discharged from the armed forces, is busy here in quarters directing his crew in readying his James M. Cole Circus for its first season since he entered the army."

"All trucks and trailers, fifteen in number and all show-owned, will be painted and lettered. The ticket wagon and advance truck will be done in white enamel with gold leaf. The other units will have silver bodies, red cabs and sunburst wheels. Charles Lockier, well-known Auburn, New York, sign painter and model circus builder, is doing the work."

"All canvas will be new and 100 per cent flameproof. A new grandstand, seven high, and new blues, nine high, which will seat 1,500 persons, with 800 grandstand chairs, are being built here. Arthur Cruikshank and Walter Spier, who were with Cole before he went in the army, are back again and in charge of building. John Beyea, a lot man and Dick Caster, master carpenter and builder, are working here, as are Joe Myers, circus fan from Auburn, New York, who is doing the mechanical work, and Dan Maney, who is doing the iron work."

Further news of the new Cole show appeared in the December 15 *Billboard*: "Capt. Eugene Christy and his lions have been signed by the James M. Cole Circus as next season's feature act. Christy has been off the road the last few seasons but has continued his lion training and exhibitions at special events and fairs, and is at present on the police force in Indiana, Pennsylvania."

"James M. Cole announces that his show, which will take to the road in 1946 after a lapse of a few years because of his being in the army, is rapidly taking shape. He plans to carry two sets of stakes next

The James M. Cole Circus midway marquee and big top in Milton, Pennsylvania on April 25, 1946.



season, with a stake driver being one jump ahead of the show at all times and having the lot laid out and the stakes being driven as the show moves in."

A photo was published in that issue of the newly completed and decorated pick up truck containing an air calliope. As the trucks were completed in quarters they were sent two at a time to Auburn, New York where Charlie Lockier did the lettering and decorating. An article in the January 13 *Syracuse Post Standard* stated that the Cole show would move on twenty trucks and that ten of them would be painted in Auburn and the others at the quarters.

The next week the *Billboard* brought additional news of the new show: "Cole relies on home state to get show rolling.

"There will be a load of home town and home state flavor about the three ring circus that James M. Cole takes out on the road from the Penn Yan winter quarters late next April.

"Cole, freshly discharged from military service, is surrounding himself with both local men and local materials as he speeds plans to re-enter the outdoor amusement field as a circus owner.

"His staff is sprinkled generously with up-state New Yorkers who passed up other offers awaiting the boss' return. One who sweated it out until Jimmy got back is George Daniels, of Ogdensburg, slated to handle general agent duties. Another is H. J. Lane, East Liverpool, brigade manager. John Beyea, Penn Yan boyhood chum of Cole, will be electrician. Frank Snyder, a rural mail carrier of Red Creek, will take a leave to be lot man for the Cole outfit. Others engaged for the coming season include Frank Williams, superintendent of tickets; William Mathaes, concessions superintendent and Jules Jacobi, side show manager.

"Here at winter quarters, Warren Spier and Arthur Cruikshank, who operated a gas station at Otego until Cole was out of uniform, are building and painting show equipment as Cole rushes plans to open the 1946 tour at Bath, New York, April 24. "The new Cole calliope, complete with gas generated engines, bears the handiwork of Charles Lockier, Auburn sign painter and widely known for his activity in the CFA, CHS and Circus Model Builders organizations. The new circus grandstand, recently completed, was constructed from materials bought of Kenneth Van in the Adirondack section of



Cole truck No. 17 carried the light plant in 1946.

Northern New York. Richard Castner, Penn Yan carpenter, built the seats.

"Circus acts already signed for next season, according to Cole, include the Bedell Troupe, teeter-board; Al Avarado and Betty, wire act; Two Jacks, high perch; Tama Frank and Company, knife throwers; Prince Nelson, trapeze; Conley's equestrian act; Monty Beehler, dog act; Michael Guy, band director and Capt. Eugene Christy, animal act.

"Installation of a heating plant at quarters here has been completed by Harry Phillips, enabling workmen to continue activity without suffering from cold."

Cole added to the buildings at the quarters. The original barn housed the general equipment and a new large heated "L" shaped barn housed the paint and carpenter shops.

During the winter Cole received the elephant Frieda from Ray W. Rogers. The bull had been on LaMont Bros. from 1921 until 1932, except in 1925 when she was on the Frank J. Taylor show. Frieda was sold to Rogers in 1933 and was on the his

The complete Cole side show was carried in truck No. 22 in 1946.



Barnett and Wallace shows from 1933 until 1942. Rogers leased her to Roy Bible for his Sello Bros. Circus from 1943 to 45. The elephant had become hard to handle and was in poor physical condition. Rogers phoned Cole and told him if he wanted Frieda he could come and get her. In a recent interview Cole said he loaded a truck with top grade New York state timothy hay and oats and set off for York, South Carolina. Upon arrival he found Frieda chained to a tree. The back door of the truck was opened and Frieda got wind of the fresh hay and

after being released from the tree headed straight into the back of the truck. Although no one in York wanted to get near the elephant, Cole found her no problem to handle and their long relationship began. Rogers was glad to get rid of the ill-tempered bull and gave her to Cole.

Cole placed an ad in the March 2, 1946 *Billboard* wanting a calliope player, banner man, property men and a side show manager.

The March 30 *Billboard* carried an extensive piece on the Cole show reading: "James M. Cole sets spec, billing plans.

"Mike Guy, bandmaster, spent three days here, huddling with James M. Cole on the music for the program and spec of the James M. Cole Circus.

"George Shirley, brigade manager, was in for two days and went over billing plans. He says he will have four billers. Special paper is being prepared on Mike Guy and his band and Capt. Christy's wild animal act, and a new line of colored lithos is being readied.

"Charles Lockier and Joseph Myers are overseeing the construction of the new stake driver. Lockier, who is decorating the show, has two more units to finish and the show will be ready.

"General agent Lane will leave March 26 to contract dates. Whitey Casey, general superintendent, will arrive April 1. Lionel Cole, assistant manager and nephew of James M. Cole, is in charge of the mechanics. Lionel was discharged recently from the paratroopers. John Beyea, electrician, also has his department in.

"Besides Christy's animals, other acts set include the Conley family, seven people bareback act and the Great Bedell troupe, five people teeterboard artists."

Joe Myers had these

comments in 1946 on the return of James M. Cole to the circus business: "James M. Cole was in the U. S. Army from October 1943 until September 1945. When he knew his discharge was about due he put in operation plans for a bigger and better circus than ever before. My orders came to me as to what work to start at winter quarters at Penn Yan, New York, as I was caretaker while he was away. I started repairing and overhauling the motor equipment which at that time numbered nine units.

"Mr. Cole arrived home and at once plunged into the work of framing his show for 1946. Trips were made to all parts of the United States to secure trucks, lumber and other equipment. A new big top and a side show top entirely fireproof and waterproof were ordered from United States Tent & Awning Company. It was delivered to quarters April 15th. Three former employees of Mr. Cole in 1942 and 1943, Walter Spier, Albert Cruickshank, seatmen and John Beyea, electrician, came to quarters to help build the show.

"Soon after the first of the year several more men were put to work including Frank Cassey, general superintendent, who supervised the construction of the rigging and all other items.

"The opening date was set for April 24 at Canton, Pennsylvania. Charlie 'Sunburst' Lockier went to work on the trucks with his paint and brushes. Trips were made by Cole to Chicago, New York and to Macon Georgia, where a light plant and a bull truck were secured from the Clyde Beatty show that was going to rails in 1946.

"After searching all over the country trying to get a stake driver, Mr. Cole asked me late in March if I would build one. He had sold the one I had built for him in 1943. So, Lockier and I got our heads together and soon had plans for another one. Faced with the same problem of shortage of material I had in 1943, I finally finished it and delivered it to quarters late in the evening of April 19, the day before the show left quarters for the opening on the 20th. Only one truck failed on the trip and that one ran out of gas.

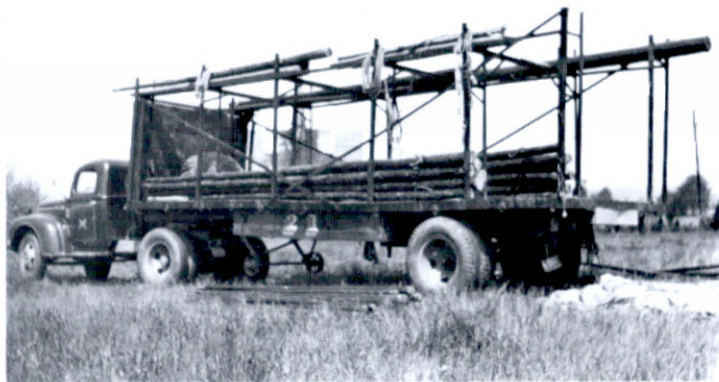
"Everything was up and ready for opening day. Even the weather man co-operated with summer like weather. The big top was an 80



James Cole, Charlie Lockier and Joe Myers with the new stake driver built for the 1946 show.

with three 40s and the side show was a 40 with three 20s. The people in that town really turned out for the opening. There were over 2,400 admissions, but the weather man soon failed the show and on the next day the skies opened up and for seven weeks after the show had nothing but rain and mud. It was at Milton, Pennsylvania, the second stand, that Cole realized that he had one of the best elephants in the country, Frieda, who, for weeks after, drew the show on and off the lot every day. She truly lived up to her name as 'the greatest single performing elephant in the world.' Had it not been for her the show would not have moved, and only once did she ever stop and that was in Ithaca, New York. The lot was a sea of mud and the plank truck was buried with the wheels out of sight. The Bailey Bros. Circus played the city the same day and that night Dolly Jacobs brought her big elephant, Modoc, over to assist Frieda and together they took the truck off the lot. This was done by Dolly Jacobs in appreciation of Mr. Cole sending his elephant man over to the Bailey show to

The Cole big top pole semi no. 21 in 1946.



work her bulls as she had no elephant man at the time."

When quarters work had been completed Myers made this inventory of rolling stock:

#1 Advance car, Ford 1/2 ton panel.

#3 Advance car, 1938 Chevrolet panel.

#10 Stake driver truck, 1937 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet short wheel base.

#11 Mechanic truck, tires, gas and tools, 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet long wheel

base.

#12 Mechanic truck, tools and living quarters, 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet long wheel base.

#14 Reserve seat plank, front side, 2 ton Dodge platform.

#15 Office trailer and big show tickets, 18 foot trailer.

#17 Three light plants, 2 ton International panel body.

#20 Plank truck, 1946 Ford tractor and 30 foot semi-trailer.

#21 Big Top pole truck, 1946 Ford tractor and a 30 foot semi-trailer.

#22 Side show truck on 1 1/2 ton Ford platform.

#23 Property and chair truck, 1 1/2 ton Ford panel.

#24 Chair truck, 1 1/2 ton Ford panel.

#25 Sleeper truck, 18 foot trailer.

#27 Sleeper truck, 18 foot trailer.

#28 Elephant truck and sleeper, 1941 Ford tractor and 30 foot semi-trailer.

#30 Air calliope truck, 1/2 ton Ford panel pick-up.

#35 Canvas truck, 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet Army unit with canvas top.

#40 Cage truck with five lions, 5 ton GMC long wheel base.

#41 Concession truck, 1 1/2 ton GMC truck with 1/2 ton trailer and auxiliary light plant.

#42 Concession truck, peanuts and popcorn, 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet panel.

#-Stock truck, ponies, llamas and monkeys, 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet platform

#-Stock truck, liberty horses, 2 ton GMC panel body.

Non-show owned rolling stock were:

3 Buses converted to living quarters, two with animal trailers.

1 Dodge stock truck and horse trailer.

1 International truck with pit show and grease joint.

15 Autos with living trailers.

The show made an eighty mile jump to Canton, Pennsylvania for the opening on April 24. On April



21 the Canton newspaper published an article with the headline: "Cole Circus to open at Canton, 50th anniversary of Lee show."

"Advance units of the new James M. Cole began rolling into Canton on Saturday afternoon in preparation for its grand opening of the 1946 season on April 24.

"It's a big occasion, for this is the 50th anniversary of the last grand opening of the famous Charles Lee Circus, which had winter quarters for so many years in Canton and became such an integral part of the community."

The seventh stand of the season was in Hagerstown, Maryland. It was here that the *Billboard* reporter visited and provided the opening review reading: "James M. Cole gets overflow at Hagerstown."

"May 4. Back on the road for the first time since 1943, owner-manager Jimmy Cole having been in the army, the James M. Cole Circus has been doing okay since opening April 25 at Canton, Pennsylvania."

"Big problem thus far has been getting up on time, but the show has been drawing well."

"Performances here Wednesday (1) were part of a May Day affair that pulled a full matinee house and an overflow night crowd. Previous day at Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, the show ran into difficulty in setting up. Lot, a former industrial plant site, was virtually a rock pile. Show pulled in on time, but the matinee was delayed 45 minutes. Afternoon show drew a three-quarter house and there was an overflow night crowd."

"Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, April 29, accounted for a strong matinee and a full one at night. The stand at Lewistown on April 27 was held to a matinee. Show, handicapped by an inexperienced crew, arrived late but a strong house turned out."

"Staff: James M. Cole, owner-manager; H. J. Lane, general agent; Dorothy Cole, treasurer; Frank Casey, superintendent of canvas; John Berger, lights; Charles Mack-

Semi trailer No. 28 carried Frieda the elephant and had a sleeping compartment in the front.

ey, assistant; Frank Whalen, properties; Joseph M. McMahon, front door; Ayres Davies, reserved seats; Maynard Visengood, reserved ticket seller; Bill Tumber, side show manager; Henry Vonderheid, concessions; James Madison, maintenance; Mike Guy, bandmaster; Charles Cuthbert, announcer, and Maybelle Sawdey, Mary Christy, Viola Frederickson and Mrs. Cuthbert, grandstand ticket takers.

"Billers in advance are George Shively, brigade agent; Richard Schultz, Joseph Favareau and Walter Widener."

"On the midway are Bill Maithis, popcorn, and Henry Vonderheid, candy floss, novelties and grab joint. Side show has Capt. Christy's lions and Frank M. Farrell, magician and ventriloquist. "Prices are

The interior of the 1946 big top with the Christy steel arena in the center ring. James M. Cole collection.



60 and 90 cents. Grandstand goes for 60 cents and concert, 25 cents. Side show price is 30 cents to everyone. Blinky Hoffman works the come-in.

"Concert is presented by Tama Frank and Patsy and consists of an impalement act, whip cracking, rope spinning and catches."

"The big top is an 80 with three 40s. Side show is a 50 with two 20s."

A more extensive review of the Cole show appeared in the May-June *White Tops* written by James L. Harshman. It read: "The predominant impression of the James M. Cole Circus on this observer upon first beholding it was one of complete agreement with Mike Guy's statement: 'Here truly is a miniature Sells-Floto!' Mike, who's fine band is gathering more and more laurels all along the route, made this statement the first time he saw the show on the lot in Canton, Pennsylvania, the opening stand. No motor show was ever more beautifully painted. Charles Lockier is chiefly responsible for painting and ornamenting show equipment and truly he has done a masterful job."

"The personable Mr. Jimmy Cole, discharged last fall from the Army after meritorious service, has built himself a show which reflects his own enthusiasm, good taste, and high regard for 'giving the public what it wants.' The program he is presenting this season is every bit as diversified as that of any other motorized circus in the nation. It is presented in a brand new shining white top—an 80 with three 40's. Center poles are painted a brilliant red; quarter poles are blue. Interior of top fairly radiates color with red and blue predominating."

"Surrounding the top, from end to end, between the hippodrome track and the reserves and blues is more color, in the shape of white canvas bordered with red and the letters JMC emblazoned in red attached to the guard rails in front of each section. Seating capacity is about 2,000.

"Mike Guy's eight piece band, smartly uniformed in red and gold, dispenses real circus music and adds immeasurably to the fine performance presented in the three rings. The calliope makes noon hour trips through the downtown streets whenever possible and is proving a fine advertisement. The band really works, playing a half hour concert before each performance and accompanying the aftershow as well.

"Shortage of manpower is critical, and, as a result, side show has not been up since the Canton opening. There is also a pit show.

"Elephant Frieda is hauled in a big semi used on the Beatty show last season. Sleeping quarters for several prop boys have been built in the fore part.

"Clown alley includes Blinky Hoffman, producing clown and Chuck Romaine with assists from Jimmy Troy. Charles La-Pearl is scheduled to join soon.

"All acts are sparkling in new wardrobe and everyone from front door to property men is uniformed.

"F. M. Farrell, member of the Circus Historical Society, is trouping with the show as magician and ventriloquist and also helping out on reserves.

"The program was as follows:

1. Capt. Eugene Christy's fighting lions. Tournament has been eliminated due to animal chutes blocking part of track. Christy gets show under way in fine fashion. Plenty of action as he battles his five viral young lions in the arena. Act moves to lightning paced climax.

2. Jimmy Troy, comedy traps in ring 1. Exciting heel catches and chair balancing on trapeze. Bedell Trio, comedy acrobats in ring 3. Agile tumblers with a keen sense of comedy.

3. Riding dog and coyote in ring 1 presented by the Beehlers. Riding monkeys and dogs in ring 3 presented by the Conleys.

4. Web Acts. Ring 1, Miss Nelson. Ring 3, Miss McIntosh.

5. Clowns.

6. Frieda, elephant presented by Sam Warren. One of the best single bull acts on any show.

7. Principal riding, ring 2, Miss Ruth Conley. Clown stops by Blinky Hoffman.

8. Slack Wire, James Troy. The versatile

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RESERVED SEAT SALE ALL DAY AT SHOW GROUND



ONE DAY ONLY
Afternoon 3 P. M. Evening 8 P. M.

★ FREE PARKING FOR 3,000 CARS ★

Newspaper ad used by the Cole show in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, the day before the show closed the 1946 season.

Mr. Troy does admirably on the wire, first as a drunk and, later, as a straight acrobatic wire performer.

9. Monty Beehler's canines. A really outstanding exhibition of superbly educated dogs. This act is center ring on any show.

10. High school horse presented by Tama Frank. A menage act by Frank's well trained steed.

11. Clowns.

12. Aerialists. Ring 1, Miss Nelson, single traps. Ring 2, The Troy Duo, Roman Rings. Ring 3, Grace McIntosh, single traps finishing with a remarkable display of endurance by throwing her body over the trapeze bar more than fifty times.

13. Concert announcement, Tama Frank and Patsy with Tama Frank, Jr.

14. Clowns.

15. Tight wire, the Great Alvarado. Tonio Alvarado is one of the discoveries of this year. The youthful Mexican performer, recently discharged from the service, has the mark of greatness stamped unmistakably upon him. He lists among his favorite artists of the wire, Con Colleano and Harold Barnes, and, we feel sure, the day is not too far distant when he will challenge even those two masters of the slender strand. His several changes of wardrobe during his performance, ending in dazzling toreador attire, adds much color to a splendid act.

16. Bare-back riding. The Conley Family, a feature of fairs for many years and last season with Dailey Bros. Circus,

present a very creditable exhibition of bare-back equestrians.

17. Clown walk around.

18. The Bedell Troupe. One of the best group of teeterboard acrobats to be found anywhere. A sock closing number for a fine show!

"In the concert, Tama Frank presents his wonder horse, does a turn with the bull whip, and some fancy rope spinning. Little three year old Tama Frank, Jr. does some intricate things with the lariat also and captures the hearts of the patrons—a remarkable little trouper! Frank does some knife-throwing with assistance from a member of the audience and Blinky Hoffman and then colludes the aftershow with 'The Whirl of Death,' impalement act in which Frank's wife, Patsy, is secured to a circular target which revolves at a fast clip and, while moving thus, Frank outlines her body with knives. Very thrilling, indeed!

"Show has had good weather to date and last three stands Chambersburg and Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, and Hagerstown, were all winners with overflows at night all three days.

"Show looks strictly high class in every department from front to back and with acts such as the Conleys, Tonio Alvarado, Christy's lions, Jimmy Troy, the Bedells, and Monty Beehler's animals, augmented by Mike Guy's fine band and some great comedy by Blinky Hoffman. I can't see how it can miss enjoying a most successful season provided sufficient labor can be secured to keep it moving on time, the success of the Great James M. Cole Circus is virtually assured."

The week after the show opened this report appeared in the *Billboard's* dressing room gossip column: "Weather was tops for opening at Canton, Pennsylvania, and the show had two packed houses. It was the 50th anniversary here of the opening of the Charles Lee Great London Circus, and town made a holiday of it, with stores closing and schools out at noon.

"Visitors included Harry Phillips, Francis Farrell, Mr. and Mrs. Lockier, and George Bullock, Canton circus fan and old-time calliope player. Art (Doc) Miller joined for the day and helped butch candy.

"During the matinee at Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, Tama Frank slipped in his knife throwing turn and cut his wife's leg. She was back at the night show, however. Bill Tumber's monk went on a rampage at Frederick, Maryland.

"Mike Guy's calliope concerts up-town at noon have been scoring."

The show was in Frederick, Maryland

on May 2 and then returned to Pennsylvania for nineteen stands. Bailey Bros Circus day and dated Cole in Sayre, Pennsylvania on May 24.

Ithaca, New York was played on May 25, again day and dating the Bailey show with the lots being across the street from one another.

On June 10 the show played its home base of Penn Yan. A new spec, Spangleland, was introduced there with Marcella Visingard as prima donna. Young Jimmy Cole made his debut in Penn Yan working the elephant. The Bedell troupe left in Fulton, New York on June 25 and were replaced by the LaBlonde troupe.

The Cole show had a near blow down in Massena, New York on July 1. Lot superintendent Dave McIntosh and his crew prevented trouble by quickly dropping the big top and the only damage was a broken quarter pole. Albert Fleet and his chimps joined and Kirk Adams and his dog act left for fair dates. The Dobas, perch act, joined the show late in June.

The show remained in New York until July 29 when it entered New Jersey at Newton on July 30. Cole played two stands in Delaware and was in Chesterton, Maryland on August 22. On August 31 the show was in Exmore, Virginia and in Elizabeth City, North Carolina on September 4.

At the end of August Cole advertised for a mechanic and black musicians for the side show.

The *Billboard* commented on the Cole show in the September 14 issue: "James M. Cole sets 'em on the straw twice Labor Day.

"September 7. The James M. Cole Circus struck it rich in Portsmouth, Virginia on Labor Day (2), after a stretch of spotty business on its southward trek thru New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.

"Favored by warm, clear weather and a holiday, show had 'em on the straw both afternoon and night, with kids crowded up to the end ring

"Conditions were not so pleasant Thursday (29) at Crisfield, Maryland, where the matinee was almost rained out. A good crowd turned out at night, however, despite the dampness.

"After playing Exmore, Virginia, on the Peninsula, Saturday (31), show came to Portsmouth via ferry Sunday (1) for the Labor Day date. Only other Virginia spot on the route was Suffolk, Tuesday (3), after which the show entered North Carolina at Elizabeth City."

The following week a *Billboard* article read: "J. M. Cole ends season in N. C.

"Greensboro, North Carolina, September. 14. The James M. Cole Circus



Cole truck No. 24 carried chairs during the 1946 season.

failed to play its billing at Wilson, North Carolina, Wednesday (11) and here Thursday (12) and is reported to have closed at Tarboro, N. C., Tuesday (10).

The *Wilson Times* told the story: "The James M. Cole Circus, scheduled to give performances in Wilson Wednesday afternoon and night, did not come to town. It is understood that the circus has disbanded and will give no further performances this year. The circus disbanded, so it is said, because it was not making expenses.

"The last performance the circus gave was in Tarboro Tuesday."

A route book was published for the 1946 James M. Cole Circus tour. It listed total mileage for the season as 3,723. The circus presented 240 performances, and missed 5. Three extra performances were given. The show played 7 states and 119 towns.

Jimmy Cole had a close friendship with circus fan Paul Van Pool of Joplin, Missouri. The two conducted a voluminous correspondence. The Van Pool collection, now at the Circus World Museum, includes a number of letters from Cole to Van Pool which provide insight in the trials and tribulations of running a circus.

On September 8, 1946 Cole wrote to Van Pool: "Do you really feel that when Mr. Edgar [owner of Sparks Circus] and Mr. [Floyd] King balance their books they will have made plenty of money? I hope they both have. I know that I haven't and my main reason is the high cost of every item I have to purchase and the salaries I am forced to pay in order to keep people. For instance I pay ticket sellers \$40.00 per week. I know definitely that King does not pay them any salary. If I cannot be honest and respectable and stay in this business then I will fold and say I am not a showman.

"I could have a lousie and weak performance, give the public nothing and take their money same as Bradley & Ben-

son and Sello Bros., but I could not call myself a showman. Of course this is my attitude and other people look at things different. If I am unable to run a circus then I will quit before I will be connected with or drag a rag bag around the country. I don't have larceny in my blood and I am damn proud of it.

"We are doing no business at all since crossing the Mason Dixon line. [Buck] Owens and Hunt Bros are both wild catting now and jumping in ahead of me. I was contracted way up to Mississippi as I had two contracting agents. I have also learned since coming into North Carolina that Bailey Bros. really left these towns bad. The sheriff in Williamston refused passes because he said Bailey charged all the officials \$1.50 per pass last year.

"I am not going farther south as Bailey, King, Dailey and Beatty all will be fighting it out, so I am turning and starting back north to Penn Yan where I know I can winter the stuff and it will be safe."

The next *Billboard* report on the Cole show appeared in the September 28 issue: "Penn Yan, New York, Sept. 21. In a deal closed here Thursday (19), B & C Shows will be enlarged for the remainder of the season. Shows reached an agreement with the James M. Cole Circus, recently closed for the season, to furnish an elephant free act, circus side show, monkey and menagerie."

James Cole provided the *Billboard* with his plans in the October 5 issue: "J. M. Cole will play indoor winter dates, lays plans for 1947.

"James M. Cole, back in winter quarters after closing his show September 10, announced he will play indoors with a unit this winter as he did before his Army service. The show made a 676 mile jump from Tarboro, North Carolina to Penn Yan, where it has new buildings.

"We have everything packed away," Cole said. "All canvas was dried and all poles painted. We will start after the holidays to repair and repaint seats and ring curbs. Our rolling stock is in excellent condition."

"Common sense dictated the closing of the show," according to Cole. "Following two or three shows into a town would have been suicide." "We had twenty-one weeks, and to keep out at a loss, just to say you had a twenty-five weeks season is not good business. I called the personnel together and gave them the picture and everyone agreed with my judgement."

"All hands were paid in full and most expect to return next season. Checks were mailed to newspapers in towns cancelled

that had already carried ads. Among the towns cancelled were Wilson, Goldsboro, Smithfield, Dunn, Fayetteville, Rockingham and Monroe, all North Carolina, and York and Chester, South Carolina."

On October 8 Cole wrote Van Pool: "Well I returned home Sunday after playing two weeks with the B & C carnival at fairs. I made \$500.00 over expenses on the two weeks so it was worth it."

"I also learned that an elephant causes more excitement and publicity for a fair than anything else there. This one bull was the center of attraction."

"I have had in mind for sometime and now after playing two fairs with the bull as a grandstand attraction, that I would like to get three medium size bulls, an eight horse liberty act and a pony drill and play as a unit at fairs, in theaters and at big indoor dates. I feel there is a big field for this as Will Hill is the only independent act left, as Dolly [Jacobs] seems to stick to circuses. The unit would make more money and not the grief I have trying to juggle this show around year after year with no good circus people around you. If I could sell my show so that I had the capital I would be starting in tomorrow to frame a unit."

"I just do not have the capital either to really carry on a show the size I have as I don't have angels like King, Bob Stevens and Buck Owens have. I don't carry racks like they do to fall back on."

News of a booking of the Cole show in the fall of 1947 came in the November 2 *Billboard*. "Circus signed by N. Y. annual for 1947 run."

"New York, October 26. The Mineola (Long Island, New York) fair will feature the James M. Cole Circus in its entirety as its 1947 grandstand attraction for five days. Contracts were signed here Wednesday (23) by Charles Bochert, fair manager, and James M. Cole, circus owner."

"Plans call for the presentation of the circus under one-half of its big top so that one complete side will be open to the peaks of the center poles and so afford an unobstructed view to the audience. The 220 foot top will be erected on the race track directly in front of the grandstand, which measures 300 feet in length. End and middle pieces of the canvas will be split in the center. With one-half of the canvas down it will be necessary to run a cable between the four center poles so that the remaining canvas can be laced to keep it from sagging."

"Cole said that a circus-under-canvas theme will be maintained through out in accordance with presentation plans by Bochert. The circus ticket wagon will be

used for all ticket sales. The circus marquee will take the place of the regular grandstand entrance, and the menagerie and side show will be presented under canvas directly inside the entrance."

"Bochert was known to be dickering for a complete circus following the staging of this year's annual fair when the last of a series of rodeo presentations failed to pan out as expected. Cole will receive a guarantee reported to be in excess of his weekly nut and cut the grandstand gross over and above this amount on a 50-50 basis with the fair."

"An estimated 1,000 box seats will be set up on the paddock. Grandstand capacity is 3,000. A heavy promotion program will start long in advance of the scheduled showing beginning September 9 and will involve the use of considerable circus paper. It is likely that several circus parades will be staged during fair week."

"If necessary the regular circus performance will be augmented, Cole said. Booking, involving a guarantee and coming late in the season, was looked upon as a natural by the circus owner."

After returning from a trip to Nebraska on November 15 Cole wrote Van Pool: "I made it home. Got in with the semi and load on Thursday. I enjoyed being with you and Mrs. Van Pool. Sure sorry about your oil drilling. If you have any extra beans like that to invest you might better take a chance with me as I would give you security of some sort, haha."

"I did so want to make more money this past season as I wanted to put up another building. Have made my own plans for an animal barn, machine shop, living quarters for help and ring barn all in one. It would be a wonderful set up. As is now I have no good place for animals and no place to train them."

"I got the big [Bell Bros.] semi, six horse liberty act, ring curb, trappings, several thousand sheets of pictorial paper, a stake

The props and additional chairs were carried in truck No. 23 during the Cole 1946 tour.

driver, two shetland colts and a beautiful llama all for \$4,000.00."

"I may ask you for a loan before spring if you can grant it as I have hired a horse trainer to start in January and will have Dave McIntosh besides three or four others in quarters to repair the stuff and feed and everything is still too damn high."

"I visited Clyde Bros. in Muscatine, Iowa. Saw Jack and Jake Mills in Cleveland. Showed them the stuff. They are breaking two acts and have a drunken trainer. He is okay when they can keep him sober. Stopped and saw old Walter L. Main on way through Geneva, Ohio. He was pleased to see the stock. Poor fellow sitting there in the house with his memoirs in front of him living circus life over and over. It sure is awful how this business grabs a hold of a fellow, isn't it."

The November 23 *Billboard* reported on the further activities of James M. Cole: "James M. Cole books cat act from Jacobs, buys liberty horses."

"Chicago, November 16. James M. Cole informed the *Billboard* this week that while visiting the Shrine Circus at Kansas City, Missouri, he contracted with Terrell Jacobs to furnish a five-lion act with a new aluminum arena for the James M. Cole Circus in 1947. Act will be worked by a trainer to be announced later and billed as Terrell Jacobs' lions."

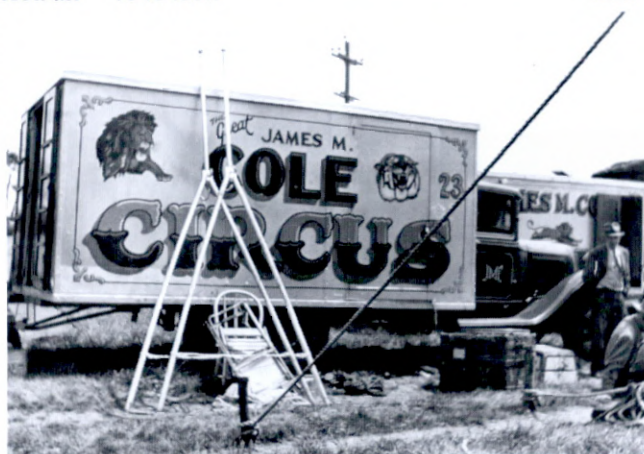
"Cole also arranged with George Pughe, promotional director of the K. C. Shrine Circus to design a new cover for Cole's souvenir program--and compile a full-size newspaper herald for use on the advance."

"Cole accompanied by Charles J. Meyer, his general agent, went from Kansas City to Geneva, Nebraska, winter quarters of Bell Bros. Circus. There he bought the Bell Bros. spotted six-horse liberty act with two high-school horses, a large male llama for his menagerie, a 30-horse semi and a stake driver."

"Cole said his show next season would have twenty-two show-owned trucks, including a new covered elephant semi, a new cookhouse truck and a new concession truck. Charles Lockier again is to paint the show, with heavy use of scroll designs."

"Our show in 1947 will continue to be 'America's most beautiful motorized circus,' Cole said. 'With more show-owned stock and the five lion act, we will have an even stronger and more pleasing performance than this year. And Meyer is lining up a strong advance so we will be able to meet any opposition that happens to come our way.'"

Cole wrote Van Pool on November 24: "If you hear from Albert Fleet please have him get in



touch with me right away or let me know where I can reach him. He told me when we closed if I could get five cats he would work them. Terrell Jacobs said he would break five if I could get Albert to work and take care of them. Also he would let me have a cage.

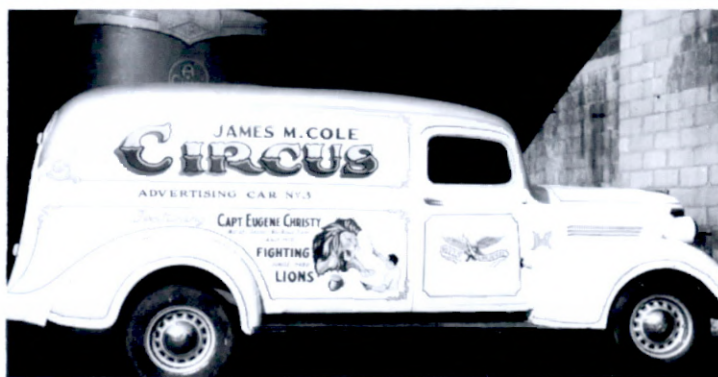
"I sure am sick about what you said regarding the bulls. I could hold my own with Cole Bros. if I only had three or four bulls now with the appearance of my equipment."

Writing to Van Pool on December 7 Cole said: "Well, I know you have been hollering but you may have to help me out now providing you will take another chattel mortgage or what ever security you want as I went and sprung. This means another semi and another straight job for a cage wagon, and some cage animals. I have ordered a new all white Hopper flameproof side show top, just like my new big top, a 50 with three 20s, four poles and side wall. It will be trimmed in red and blue like the big top. It will be a beauty. And damn you a new 120 foot double deck banner line with a double door piece. Just like Pete Kortess had on Beatty this past season. \$1,250.00 just for the banners. This means new banner poles and rigging. But you asked for it and we got it. But my cash balance is depleted. I will use my last year's side show top for a menagerie top. So I will have some spread of canvas with cookhouse tops and all. I can just picture you when you read this giving a couple of hurrahs but you fellows that sit behind desks and plan all these things don't have to worry about paying for them or have to work to get them up and down in all the mud and crap.

"I agree with you it is going to be a marvelous looking show next season, but God have pity on me if the customers don't come, but I sure got to make them somehow. So if you have an extra money after buying your Christmas presents, I may have to ask you for some as don't know who else to turn to. I don't want you to think I am trying to take advantage of your friendship because you helped me once but I have gone and done it now.

"Well, let me hear you brag about talking me into it."

Van Pool, obviously thinking of himself as Cole's "official" advisor, had made some suggestions concerning the canvas layout for the 1947 season. He also shared Cole's wish to enlarge the elephant herd. Writing to Van Pool on December 17 Cole said: "Appreciate your wanting to get Dolly's [Jacobs] bulls and place



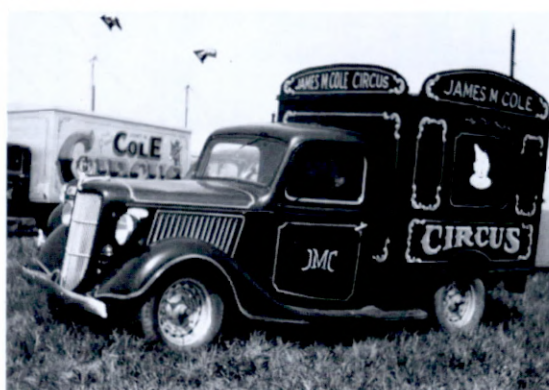
This attractively lettered panel truck was the James M. Cole Circus No. 3 advance advertising car in 1946.

them over here. We didn't get any place as she already has signed up with the [Buck] Owens show for next season she said. She likes Owens and wife. Also she wouldn't want to be with Mrs. Cole and as you probably have heard how she is carrying on, and we don't allow that kind of stuff on our lot. I was brought up under Jerry Mugivan's Corp. and I have rules and they better go by them.

"Regarding Mr. Myers [Cole's agent], don't blame him if we get bounced around as long as he has done what I told him to do and he will. Last season [H. J.] Lane didn't do only a third of the time what I told him to do. I would have played my way back up through Virginia but he went against orders and contracted ten more days in Carolina after I had ordered him out of the state. When I could not locate him on the route I had given him and found out what he had done, I took it to the barn. I realize daily what I will be up against next spring as they are all going to really pile east, Cole Bros., Dailey Bros., Sparks, Bailey, King and even Mills might. But they also have each other to fight so can't fight me all the time.

"I will have about the same per-

This pickup truck carried an air calliope for downtown bally on the Cole show in 1946.



formance as last year, which is a very good circus and good variety. Will have two pony drills, three dog acts. Two by Kirk Adams which are the very best in the business. Plan to keep three rings filled most of the time except when have feature acts. My slack wire is tops, Jimmy Troy. Have good trap acts, have the Bedell tetterboard act who were with me last year. I will call them the Morris Troupe this year.

Conleys want to come back but haven't closed with them. Will have Albert Fleet's dog act and his chimps and my six horse liberty act. Have a funny Ford act (Jeep) and five clowns are contracted. And if Jacobs frames the five lion act, Albert Fleet will work it and will be okay for opener. And perhaps we will get two more bulls so what more would you want."

Cole was actively seeking more elephants. He advised Van Pool on December 24: "My surprise to you is that I am getting four bulls from the firm in New York. One baby and three of the larger ones. This will give me five so I will be able to take my show any place. A friend in New York is buying them for me. I pay him for them one hundred dollars per week.

"I will need \$4,000.00 to see me through until opening time as will have a lot of expense in help, feed and building, so if later you can loan me this same as last year I will appreciate it."

Van Pool not only considered Cole a good friend but also a solid credit risk, as the 1945 loan had obviously been paid in full.

The elephant picture changed quickly as Cole told Van Pool on December 26: "Well just as I was leaving for the barn to get the truck to start to Brooklyn for the elephants yesterday Dorothy called me back and there was a phone call from the animal dealer in New York telling me not to come as four of the six elephants died. There was only two left and a fellow from Oakland, California was coming driving all the way so he was entitled to one. Also, King Bros. truck was due and Will Hill was to pick one up. King was to get two. The Indian attendant that came over with the bulls sure must have neglected them. He said there wasn't even a blanket on them and he paid \$90.00 per blanket to have them all the way across.

"Thought you would like to know about the bulls, nine more are coming in February and if I get through okay I am suppose to get four of them. Eleven more are due in March."

ROBERT LEWIS PARKINSON

1923 -- 1991

Many people love the circus, but few ever had the disease as bad or caught it as young as Bob Parkinson. "I got hooked when I was 11 years old. That was in 1934 in Decatur, Illinois. The date was May 16. It was the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus," he stated in his crisp, precise style in a 1979 interview. During his teenage years, he chased every show which came within striking distance of his home town of Decatur. Along the way friendships were formed with numerous showmen including P. G. Lowery, and Arthur Borella. So were memories, golden ones that he recalled with a relish that clearly indicated he was talking about a time when life was perfect. One of his favorites was the occasion he and his brother Tom, always his co-conspirator on circus day, were approached by a grifter on the Cole Bros. lot. "Do you fellows want a job? Mr. Cole has authorized me to hire a few local boys to help encourage people to see the side show," he stated, meaning that he wanted a couple of shills for the kid show. "You mean, Jess Adkins," Tom piped up. "Forget it," replied the disgusted circus executive, realizing that the Parkinson brothers were not small town rubes, but precocious sophisticates wise in the ways of the show world.

Bob began collecting circus memorabilia the day he bought a program on Ringling-Barnum in 1936. That was on August 20 in Decatur. The show came in from Peoria, and headed for a two-day stand in St. Louis the next day. Bob would tell it that way; he had a memory for that sort of thing. One time in the late 1930s he and Tom spread out all their circusions. It covered a bed, and they thought they owned the Hertzberg collection.

His fascination with circus history also started in the 1930s.

The great historian Bill Woodcock Sr. frequently tutored him and Tom on the wonders of the past, either when Wallace Bros. Circus was in town or through correspondence. Once the families swapped children. While the younger Parkinsons roamed the show lot in a state of ecstasy with the elder Woodcock, his son Buckles, then a toddler, fulfilled a lifelong dream of running away to join a home by spending the day with the senior Parkinsons. John Grace and Charles Bernard, two other pioneer circus historians, were also supportive of the Illinois brothers' interest in show history. Soon the siblings were giving each other quizzes in circus history the way other boys might test one another on baseball statistics. "Name the four Sells brothers" was a typical question on Summit Street in Decatur.

The normal life changes occurred. He graduated from Millikin University in 1946, and married Marilyn Laws in 1947. Three children followed: daughter Jo Lyn in 1949, and sons Greg and Joel in 1950 and 1959. Eventually he became an insurance adjuster working out of Cam-

Two young circus fans, Bob and Tom Parkinson in 1946. Pfening Archives.



bridge, Illinois. His love affair with circuses and circusions grew. Usually accompanied by son Greg, he chased shows across the Midwest, often sleeping in his car on the show grounds during multi-day jaunts. He built an excellent general collection, highlighted by the finest privately-held group of field show newspaper ads ever assembled. By contacting companies which microfilmed newspapers, he was able to obtain tens of thousands of old papers with the understanding that he was to destroy them once he had clipped the circus ads. Once, he received six tons of history in one load.

His life changed forever in December 1964 when Chappie Fox, then director of the five year old Circus World Museum, called to tell of his plans to create a library. Would he consider heading the archive? Parkinson said later that were it not for family considerations he would have accepted the position immediately. As it was, it took him all of a few hours to get back to Fox in the affirmative.

On March 15, 1965 he started at the museum. At the time the library was located in a small building near the car shops. It contained no furniture, but did have some cabinets and tables built into the walls. Unsorted circus material of all shapes and sizes was piled on the counters and the floor. "I don't know how you're going to start in on this," Fox told him, "but it's yours." Bob reached into a box, pulled out a ticket, and placed it in a drawer. That was the beginning. Most people would have been discouraged by the poor working conditions, the isolation, the lack of equipment and the formidable challenge of cataloguing the disparate material. Not Bob, to him it was a dream come true. He was perfect for the job, and the job was perfect for him.

In 1970 the library moved to the former Effinger Brewery building on Lynn Street, adjacent to the museum grounds. The 15,000 square foot temperature and humidity controlled facility finally gave the collection a worthy home. Given adequate space and proper filing equipment, Parkinson flourished, developing elaborate administrative systems tailored to the unique nature of the holdings. The legendary index, which abstracted the names of circus personnel from programs, route books, trade publications, and other sources, soon became an indispensable research tool. Traveling displays of the library's treasures were created, and duplicate books and copies of films became available on loan. A copying service for the photos and negatives was start-



Bob Parkinson being interviewed next to the Great Circus Train. Circus World Museum collection.

ed. Most importantly, the library began annually processing thousands of requests for information from school children, scholars, genealogists, model builders, ad agencies, television and movie producers, even circuses. Under his leadership the library became the premier institution of its kind in the world, providing myriad services to more researchers than all the other public circus archives combined. Nothing significant has been written on the American circus in the last twenty years which didn't rely in some degree on the library's holdings.

The modest hodgepodge of material that he found upon arrival was soon augmented by the circus collections at the State Historical Society. In a typically Parkinsonesque gesture, he immediately donated his own collection to the museum to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest. Not long after he started, the dam broke as wave after wave of circusiana came to Baraboo. Early acquisitions included the Bostock English bills and the fabulous Lee Allen Estes lithographs. They were followed by other specialized groupings such as the Ralph Hastings posters, the Merle Evans music library, the William P. Hall papers, the Gollmar Bros. Circus business records and on and on and on. Significant general collections came from Paul Van Pool, Bill Green, Don Francis and Walter Tyson, among others.

All this material—and the mass is staggering—he carefully cataloged and filed. He proudly mother-henned it, always concerned that a researcher might mishandle an item. Those who cracked the binding on a bound volume of *Billboards* or on an old route book were sure to incur his wrath. He loved lithographs, handling them so gingerly that one would have thought they were radioactive. Watching him show off posters was like watching Van Gogh paint. Few other li-

braries ever had a director who lavished the reverential care Parkinson did on the documents under his charge.

There was disagreement on the Circus World Museum board before he was hired whether the library head should be a librarian who would learn circus history, or a circus historian who would learn library science. Fortunately, the view that circus smarts were more important than

library skills prevailed. Parkinson fit that criteria, and that combined with his organizational gifts, his attention to detail, his absolute honesty and his veneration of the material made the Circus World Museum's collection by far the best organized and best cared for anywhere. And because of his watchful eye virtually none of the pilfering, so common to libraries and historical societies of all types, took place.

While his work in the library was his passion, he served the Circus World Museum in other capacities. He assisted Fox in organizing the Schlitz circus parades in the 1960s and early 1970s, and headed the last one in 1973. He managed eight marches in Baraboo, Chicago and Milwaukee from 1980 through 1988, controlling 1001 details with amazingly complex administrative systems and a work

The warm smiling face behind the counter of the Circus World Museum Library. Circus World Museum collection.



day that often started at 3:30 am. He was a stickler for authenticity, requiring all bands to play music from 1939 or earlier, for example, because that was the last year a railroad circus paraded. Few who rode the circus train from Baraboo to Milwaukee forgot his stern visage as he barked out procedures and regulations through his omnipresent bullhorn.

From July 1984 until February 1985 he was acting director, taking the reins in a crisis situation when the museum was at low ebb. Through it all, the good times and the bad, he felt he had the greatest job in the world, and indeed, he was one of the fortunate few who made a living doing exactly what he wanted to do. If anybody was with it and for it, it was Bob.

Obsessed as he was with the circus and its history, he did have other interests. Over the years he built a huge scale model of a World War II German panzer division which he exhibited from time to time. He enjoyed war gaming, and reading military history. He was an eighth-generation elder in the Presbyterian Church, and was active in Baraboo civic affairs. Joining the Circus Historical Society in 1944, he served as president in 1966 and 1967 and occasionally contributed articles to *Bandwagon*. He recently completed a book documenting the titles of all American circuses.

He had suffered from heart disease for some time, enduring a heart attack in 1965. Early this year his doctors told him he needed open heart surgery which was performed in Madison in late February. He came through fine, and appeared well on the way to recovery when he developed severe complications. Emergency surgery failed to correct the problem and he died on the afternoon of March 7. It wasn't fair. He had planned to retire in September with the intention of continuing part-time, helping his successor and pursuing long-deferred research projects.

In 1986 he told an interviewer: "Meaning nothing against the insurance industry, if I had been an insurance adjuster all of my life, nothing would survive of my work except my social security number. When I die after developing this library, there will be something permanent whether I'm remembered or not. It will be a benefit to society for generations to come." At its March 25 meeting the board of directors of the Circus World Museum voted unanimously to name the library after this quiet man of extraordinary integrity. Nothing could be more fitting than to see the name Robert L. Parkinson on the side of the building he loved so much. After all, all he did was build the finest circus library in the history of the world. Fred D. Pfening III

Part One

Author's Note: In quoting the memories of old Australian circus identities in this article, original colloquial terms and forms of expression have been retained as far as possible. A glossary of some Australian terms and circus slang appears at the article's end. The ancestral heritage of the Colleano family, obscured for many years, has only been recently established through scholarly research by myself and others, and is outlined in this article in order to put the achievements of Con Colleano into their wider social context. Please note that the position of the seasons during the year is the reverse in the Southern Hemisphere, e.g. the Australian winter takes place during the months of June-September.

Early Days

In the earliest days of white settlement in Australia, the development of different forms of amusement and entertainment helped to counter-balance the monotony of everyday life. In the first settlements, the miseries of the convicts and the loneliness of their controllers were relieved to some extent by the spontaneous development of a live theatre tradition. Similarly, the struggles of early settlers in the bush and the outback towns were soothed by informal get-togethers. The geographical separation of towns and cities imposed a need for mobility on nineteenth century entertainment in Australia. Itinerant entertainers of any theatrical standing were welcomed with great enthusiasm. When one centre tired of a visiting show it packed up and moved on to the next. The travelling show became a part of Australian life.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the Sullivan family--the family was later to adopt the professional name of Colleano--were obscure carnival and boxing show people who wandered the eastern states of Australia turning up at every kind of country show or race meeting.

Old Cornelius Sullivan was known as "Con" Sullivan. A boxing troupe showman by profession, he hired aspiring young fighters in the cities and took them away to the bush to stand on his line-up boards to take on all and any challengers. It was said that the famous "Young Griffo" was one of his men.¹

"They were boxing show people. Old [Con] . . . as a matter of fact, had lined up with the same people as [my] dad somewhere. I heard [old Con] talking about it, when they visited Charleville, about lining up with dad. [I'm] trying to think

The Great CON COLLEANO

BY MARK ST. LEON

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[of] the name of a boxing show. [It] could have been Tulipan's, or it could have been Uncle Eddy or Uncle Jack."²

Old Cornelius Sullivan, the father of Con Colleano, was born in Maryborough, Victoria, about 1870, but apparently grav-

In the early 1920s Colleano began appearing in a Spanish costume. Pfening Archives.



itated to Sydney as a youth. The Rocks, a slum district bordering on Sydney's Circular Quay, was long frequented by the city's criminals and gangsters. Brawls and street fights were a common occurrence among the local people, drunken sailors and ruffians that frequented this area. It was only natural that Cornelius Sullivan, or Con as he was called, would learn to use his fists as the occasion required.³

Con Sullivan became a well known boxer. In 1890 he fought, albeit unsuccessfully, the Australian middleweight

champion, Jim Ryan. *The Dead Bird*, a popular Sydney sporting journal of the day, recorded the lead-up to the match in its issue of 20 September 1890: "Con Sullivan is willing to fight Jem [sic] Ryan for a purse if any of the clubs will put one up for them. Ryan says he is real sick of being idle for so long, and will accept a purse to fight Con Sullivan. Now, Gentlemen, here are a couple of men hampering for a fight, and you should give them a cut. Both say a month's training will suit them."

The fight took place at the Australian Club in Sydney on 4 November 1890. *The Referee*, another Sydney sporting journal, gave a blow-by-blow description of Con Sullivan's defeat by a knock-out in the fourteenth round: "It was a good fight and no pair of men ever stepped into a ring and fought a fairer battle. Sullivan was completely outclassed for . . . he met a phenomenon. . . . Sullivan deserves credit for his gameness and his fairness."

It then appears that Con travelled the bush with a boxing troupe for some years. It was probably a boxing troupe complete with line-up board upon which Sullivan's boxers could line up to present themselves to any prospective challengers. As is still customary in Australian boxing troupes, one of the boxers had to thump away on a bass drum to attract the peoples' attention. There is a story that old Con also spent time in America during his youth.

"When he come out here, before he got married, he used to work what they call a 'nail rock block' on the showgrounds at shows in the [country] town[s] [that] they used to hold every twelve months or so. He had four inch nails and they had to knock

it down within three hits. They'd bend over [after] the first hit [and he'd] get good money out of it. And that's how he met his wife. Narrabri, she come from Narrabri."⁴

Old Con Sullivan's wife was born Julia Vetreal Robertson, the name was later recorded as Vittorine Julia Robinson, at Narrabri, NSW on 23 October 1878, the daughter of William Robertson [sic], a shearer, aged 34 years, a native of the island of St Thomas in the West Indies (now one of the Virgin Islands), and Julia Robertson, nee Saunders, aged 33 years, a half-caste Aboriginal woman, a native of Wee Waa, NSW. William and Julia had apparently married at Brumble, Big River, NSW in 1870. The presence of a West Indian in the Australian backblocks is a little intriguing. Possibly William Robertson had been a sailor who had jumped ship in an Australian port and made his way into the outback. Julia Saunders, the daughter of Thomas Saunders, apparently a white settler, and an unknown Aboriginal woman,⁵ was burnt to death in a house fire at Narrabri in the 1890s.⁶

It is to this rich ethnic mixture, Australian Aboriginal, West Indian and Anglo-Irish that the man who would be known as the world's greatest tightwire artist, Con Colleano, owed what was once described as his own "almost Italian darkness of face and hair." But Aboriginal ancestry did not confer any special birthright in Australian society. Indeed, it was to be shunned until comparatively recently when the peaceful re-emergence of black Australia has lead to the overturning of the many the taboos established during the colonial era.

The Aborigines were Australia's original human inhabitants. Various estimates put the presence of the Aborigines on the Australian continent at between 40,000 and 100,000 years, the result of possibly three great transigrations along the land bridge that once connected what is now Australia with the southern extremities of Asia. The Aborigines were Australia's only inhabitants until the advent of white settlement in 1788. As the white presence in Australia spread increasingly from the few coastal settlements to the bush from the 1830s onwards, the early "squatters" found more large black-skinned tribes of Aborigines wandering across the land and living a primitive, stone-age existence closely adjusted to the natural environment. Confronted with tribal reactions that they had neither the time nor the inclination to under-

stand, many whites felt that they were fulfilling nature's law by displacing the inferior race with their own kind as the possessors of the land. The blacks were decimated by the vices of the white man, such as alcohol, and diseases against which the blacks had no natural immunity. Due to the lack of white women in the early frontier settlements, there occurred a great deal of co-habitation between the settlers and native women. These unions, whether voluntary or forced, led to the appearance of half-caste children, and the beginning of a social problem that still bedevils Australian society, for the half-castes became the outcasts of both races.⁷

The parents of Con Colleano, Cornelius Sullivan and Vittorine Julia Robinson [sic], were married at Narrabri, NSW on 31 October 1894. Sullivan and his wife were to have a family of ten children.

Con Colleano's birth registration. NSW Registrar General.

Both the entry of marriage of Cornelius and the entry of birth of his first child, Bonar, recorded his occupation as "labourer." By the time Emily Winifred was added to the family in June 1897 his occupation was given as "showman." The earliest reference we have to the professional show business activities of old Con Sullivan is furnished by *The Lismore Chronicle* only a few days before the birth of young Con. The issue of this newspaper dated 22 December 1899, under "district intelligence" recorded: "Last Saturday was a lively day here. Pay day and race day--the day of the year for the hotels, and as they gained so others suffered on Saturday. Peter, otherwise known as Frenchie, whose real name is said to be Monseret, is under arrest on a charge of having stabbed two men named respectively J. Ashton and C. Sullivan during a row over a game of cards. An inch on one side would have cost either of the wounded men their life. Ashton, who was removed to the hospital, was stabbed in the neck and received a very dangerous wound--indeed it was reported here yesterday that he was dead--and Sullivan was wounded on the side above the hip."

Four days later, 26 December 1899, at Lismore, the Sullivans' third and most famed-destined child was born, named Cornelius after his father but to be known, like his father, simply as "Con."⁸ Young Con was on the road from this early age as the growing Sullivan family wandered the Australian outback with the shows that travelled the interior of the country. But there is not much to signpost the family's activities in those years apart from the odd scrap of handed-down information. Young Con himself wrote later in life in a short biographical note that: "I gained my first experience in my father's circus touring Australia and did my first act at the age of three, an act consisting of tricks upon my father's feet. This work is called 'Rizzerley' [sic] named after the man who originated it."⁹

If Con's father was operating a circus at this time (cr. 1903-1904) an extensive search of contemporary Australian newspapers has failed to find any mention of it. A minor circus that travelled deep into the backblocks to entertain the shearers, drovers, and railway construction gangs would not necessarily leave much trace of its movements the way bigger shows would when they visited the larger country towns. On the other hand, what Con may have remembered as "my father's circus" may in fact have been another circus

Application P88252/84 A.



Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Act, 1973.

BIRTH REGISTERED IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Child	
Surname	SULLIVAN
Other names	Cornelius
Sex	Male
Date of birth	26th December, 1899
Place of birth	Lismore
Parents of Child	
Father - Surname	SULLIVAN
Other names	Cornelius
Occupation	Showman
Age	26 years
Place of birth	Maryborough, Victoria
Mother - Surname	SULLIVAN
Maiden surname	ROBINSON
Other names	Vittorine Julia
Age	24 years
Place of birth	Narrabri, N.S.W.
Date of marriage	23rd December, 1893
Place of marriage	Narrabri, N.S.W.
Previous children of marriage	Algar James 5 years, Emily Winifred 2, living None deceased
Informant	Certified by: C. Sullivan, father Lismore
Particulars of registration	Andrew Cochrane District Registrar Lismore
Date	9th January, 1900
Number	4386 6

I, Vernon Mark Bennett
hereby certify that the above is a true copy of particulars recorded in a register kept by me.

Issued at Sydney.

on 18th September, 1984

L.O. 143 D. West, Government Printer

Principal Registrar

or show with which his father was associated. It appears that the Sullivans were mixed up in the early years of the century with a showman named Joe Marconi. The marionette troupe which Marconi operated was part of a larger travelling show. Another isolated reference refers to young Con's first professional appearance as a clown at the age of four. Apparently, his family had to wake him up to stuff him into a suitcase for him to go through with his act.¹⁰

About 1907 the burgeoning Sullivan family settled for a time at Lightning Ridge, an opal mining community in far north New South Wales, so that the eldest of the children could receive some schooling. This settled period also allowed old Con Sullivan to teach his children some circus skills. Old Con seems to have made up his mind to get his family started in the circus business, a hard life but a lucrative one if a family of performers could succeed. Quick reactions were essential in this sort of show business, so the Sullivan parents used to place a saucerful of sugar on the table and the children sharpened their reflexes by trying to catch the flies that strayed near it.¹¹ An old circus lady, Dot Lennon (1914-), said that her mother remembers the Colleano family being camped behind her family's place on the diggings at Lightning Ridge "some time before 1912." Her mother knew them then as the Sullivans and they were "wintering" at Lightning Ridge, practising. Young Con was there.¹² She did not know if they were doing any prospecting but they probably had to do something of that nature to keep themselves fed. In any case, the entertainment starved miners might have provided the Sullivans with paying audiences at evening shows they might have put on for them.

Eventually the family returned to something like their familiar line of business and resumed their travels through the backblocks. There is some suggestion that the family operated a carnival and merry-go-round show through the outback.

"I have it that the Sullivans started out with their own circus from Lightning Ridge. A Mrs. Seaton wrote me in 1982 to say that she was trained by Mr. Sullivan to do acts for the circus. But two days before the Sullivans started out her father bundled her off to a convent. The Sullivans' circus then showed at Walgett and Moree etc. in the north west of New South Wales about 1910.¹³

There is reference to the family touring the outback with a travelling picture show that carried a repertoire of only one



Members of the Colleano family in 1922. Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre.

silent film, *The Cowboy's Sweetheart*. Whenever the projector broke down or the brittle celluloid film snapped the Colleano children were rushed onto the stage to vault and somersault until the necessary repairs could be effected.¹⁴

The Colleano Name

It was not uncommon for Australian circus people to adopt professional pseudonyms, often inspired by the names of artists famous in the Old World. It remains a mystery, however, as to how and why the Sullivan family should settle on the name of "Colleano" (or, as it originally appears to have been spelt, and is pronounced, "Collino"). One story is that the name was suggested to the family by a schoolteacher, presumably at Collarenebri, NSW where the family was settled during the period 1907-1910, approximately.¹⁵ An outback station in far north-west New South Wales called Kaleno may also have been the source of the name.

But the name of Colleano was not previously unknown in international show business either. In vaudeville in England and in the United States around the turn of the century there was a troupe of acrobats called The Kellino Family. The Kellinos appeared as a Risley act in New York according to an item in *The New York Clipper* of 19 September 1908. This

same troupe had visited Australia in 1897.¹⁶ It seems highly probable that this was the original source of the inspiration for the "Colleano" pseudonym of the Australian circus family. For all the natural ability that their native surroundings may nurture, Australian artists have long lacked the finish and polish with which artists of older, more established, cultures are imbued as a matter of course. "Australian performers were nothing, supposedly. Lots of people did the same [to give their acts a foreign touch], like tumbling acts and all those peoples."¹⁷

The Sullivans may have adopted the name for deeper reasons than merely show business ostentation, however. This Spanish sounding name would allow them to not only capitalise on the dark, swarthy appearances of their children, but to mask their Aboriginal identity. And when they did get their circus going, the Colleano family passed themselves off, not as Spaniards, but as Hawaiians!

Early Circus Days

The first definite reference we have to the Colleano circus in its own right is the small advertisement that appeared in the *Wialda Standard* of 28 November 1910. This said simply that "Collino [sic] Bros Circus will play Wialda on Race Nights," Wednesday and Thursday, 30 November and 1 December. There were no further reports. The contemporary newspapers for the adjacent towns of northern New South Wales (Glen Innes, Narrabri, Moree and Inverell) have been closely examined but no further references were found to the movements of the "Collino" circus during late 1910. A hiatus of nearly two years then ensues wherein the family's movements and show business activities again drift into obscurity. An occasional mention of a letter for "Collino Bros. Circus" in the Letter Rack column of *The Referee*, a service that was operated by this weekly Sydney newspaper for the benefit of travelling show people during the years 1911 and 1912, is the only evidence we have of the show's continuing existence.

By 1912, however, it would appear that: "The Colleanos . . . had a merry-go-round and carnival but they wanted to get [back?] into circus. They sold their merry-go-round and carnival at Collarenebri and they came with our circus, Rowan Brothers. They were just on wages. Con was then about 14 years old. His sister [Winnie] done a beautiful contortion act. Con was just learning on the wire then, I think that he was self taught. Winnie

started learning the trapeze when she was with us. A brother Bonar played in the circus band."¹⁸

The real name of the Rowan family was Denner. Old Jack Denner owned race-horses and used to race them at country race meetings. At the turn of the century he and his family travelled the outback with Eroni Bros' Circus. This association probably gave the Denner family the inspiration to form their own circus about 1907 and which, at first, was named simply Denner Bros. Circus. At some point, and for unknown reason, the Denner family adopted the professional name of "Rowan" and their circus became known as Rowan Bros. Circus. The earliest known reference to the Rowan Bros. Circus is the visit of the show to the township of Corowa, NSW in August 1911.¹⁹ The circus at this stage carried 25 performers and 43 horses, mules and donkeys. I have not established that the Colleano family were with Rowan Bros. at this time.

By the time Rowan Bros. Circus made its appearance at Hillston, NSW, on 14 December 1912, it had grown into a fair sized show and had engaged the Collino family.²⁰ The advertisements claimed that the show carried 60 horses, and mules and donkeys. Included among the 30 "lady and gentlemen" star artists were: "Raymond, The Handcuff King; Miss Pearl Denner, Champion Lady Bareback Rider of Australia; Miss Violet Denner, Flying Trapeze Artist; Miss Winifred Collino, The World's Only Figure Eight Contortionist; Special Engagement Of The Collino Family."

The *Hillston Spectator* recorded that: "The Collino Brothers perform one of the most dangerous feats ever performed on the elastic rope, single and double back somersaults, landing on the rope as they first started."

Performances of that nature were not before known in Australia and few artists overseas could have accomplished similar feats. The "Collino" brothers were of course, Bonar and Con. The Colleano children used their time with the Rowan circus to improve their performing skills. Winifred learnt to perform on the trapeze and was to achieve almost as much international fame later in her career as Con with her "heel and toe" catch on the high trapeze. Bonar played cornet in the Rowan circus band but, being the eldest of the Sullivan children, was responsible for seeing that his brothers and sisters did their practice each day. In fact, in later years when the family circus got started, Bonar

was the boss of the Colleano circus even though the father was its titular head.

Typical of family circuses, the Colleano children learnt a number of circus skills: young Con, for example, learned to ride bareback, to do the flying trapeze, to play the trombone, to clown, to tumble as well as walk the wire. Eventually, Con decided to specialise in the wire.²¹

Violet Gill went on to say that the Colleanos and Raymond, "The Handcuff King," left the Rowan circus at Balranald and "went up to Mildura to start their own circus." The Colleanos were by this time perhaps a little more sure of their ability as circus performers.

The Colleanos and Raymond were in Mildura for a few months picking fruit before teaming up with the Ashtons, descendants of one of Australia's oldest circus families who still operate a major circus to this day. This move can be dated as early in 1913 and coincided, whether by design or by accident we shall probably never know, with another turning point in Australian circus history, the break-up of the Walter St. Leon circus late in 1912. The Walter St. Leon family, in company with the Ashton family, had travelled down the Darling River in far-western NSW, from Bourke, through Wilcannia,



Colleano playing vaudeville in Australia around 1923. Author's collection.

Pooncarie and Menindee to reach Wentworth in the far south-west of the state. The break-up of the St. Leon circus ensued for some of the family wanted to settle in Wentworth. The Ashtons were left on their own resources but soon fell in with the Colleano family.²² According to an advertisement in the *Riverine Grazier* of 29 April 1913, "The Eight Flying Collinos" were among the "25 Star Artistes" that comprised Ashton's Circus during its visits to the New South Wales towns of Hay and Narandera. It could be speculated that the tightwire artistry of Ethel Ashton was a further inspiration to the young Con Colleano. Violet Gill stated that: "The

Colleanos got to Sydney and joined the King Carnival. They went north with the King Carnival, struggling all the way, but they did get good business in Rockhampton. They went further into Queensland but finally got stranded at Winton. The Colleanos started from Winton in wagons . . . and never looked back. Mo Aarons, who had done comedy in the St. Leon's acrobatic act, left St. Leon's to go with Colleano's Circus at Sarina."²³

This recollection, however, might not tell the full story. I have found reference to the King Carnival at Mount Morgan, Qld in 3-4 July 1914. Although there was no mention of the Colleano family on the bill, there was a "Mdle Sanchez," a sensational high trapeze artist, listed and this was probably—almost certainly—Winnie Colleano, Con's older sister. It was under this pseudonym that Winnie often performed when Colleano's Circus got going a few years later. But another travelling show appeared in Mount Morgan on 15 July 1914, shortly after the King Carnival. This was the travelling vaudeville company of Harry Lauder who was "supported by a company of brilliant international artists" which included, amongst other names, "The Three Hassans, In A Sensational Acrobatic Wire Act." It is possible, although by no means certain, that two of "The Three Hassans" were Con and his older brother, Bonar.²⁴

A period spent with Eroni Bros. Circus, probably during they years 1914-5 also appears to have served as a prelude to the Colleano family's formation of their own circus.

Eroni Bros. Circus

Since the heady days of the Australian goldrushes of the 1850s itinerant showmen had travelled the settled reaches of the Australian continent, bringing their entertainments to the isolated communities of town and bush. The range of entertainments that these showmen offered in those pre-electronic media days was quite extraordinary. All classes of tastes were catered for. As well as circuses, there were travelling light opera companies, vaudeville tent shows, minstrel troupes, magicians, phrenologists, magic lantern shows, wandering bands of musicians, marionette shows, boxing troupes, travelling menageries, carnivals, and so on. Circuses were universal in their appeal, however, for they combined many of the elements that other travelling entertainments had to offer, together with the additional attraction of displays of fine horses and horsemanship. Most of the old Australian circuses were built on a family tradition that, in some cases, even extended back to the old world. The circuses built for themselves reputations that spread throughout the land, their

names eventually reading like some royal roll-call in the show business aristocracy of the bush.

The oldest circus in the English-speaking world today, Ashton's, traces its Australian history as far back as 1851. How far back the history of the family in English circus goes, nobody seems to know now. The Perrys were another old Australian circus family. Descendants of the original Perry family conduct the Perry and Sole Bros circuses to this day. The original Perry family had wandered the goldfields and other mining communities as violinists and dancers for many years before starting out with their own circus in Central Queensland in 1885. There were so many Perrys in circus that some of them adopted another name, Eroni, for their circus to reduce the confusion. Perhaps the biggest wagon show in Australia during the early years of the Colleano family's fortunes was Eroni Bros. Circus.

When I interviewed George Eroni [Perry], he said that the Colleanos travelled with his father's circus for "about two years."²⁵ My guess is that the Colleanos joined the Eroni circus during the latter part of 1914 and remained with it during most of 1915. George Eroni remembered that he and young Connie Colleano used to teach other tricks on the wire in the bush. Old Con Colleano conducted a boxing sideshow outside the Eroni circus which people could attend after the main circus performance. Young Con, incidentally, became a good boxer and was billed as the "boy wonder" in his father's boxing sideshow taking on all-comers up to fifteen years of age.²⁶ Old George Eroni, 91 years of age when I interviewed him, had this to say: "That's the wagon days I'm talking about. [There were] no motor cars in the wagon days. They [the Perry family] all split up and got a portion each [of the Eroni circus]. That's why Mary [Sole] left her people, [and she] went to St. Leons' Circus. The Mackie's were with Eroni's before Uncle Jim [Perry] took them [with him and started] Perry Brothers' Circus. Eroni's went on their own [then]."²⁷ We

didn't know the Colleanos then. [We] met the Colleanos later. Old Con one day [came down to the circus]. I remember it well. It was all kiddies he had. He used to travel. I wouldn't know how they joined or [where] they joined. I reckon Con would be about thirteen or fourteen, might have been a little bit more. I think they wanted to get stuck into circus from the word go."

Eroni Bros.

NEW CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE.



Will open in DUBBO

Wednesday Next. Location.
Railway Paddock

No other ground large enough to hold them.

Three times more Horses and Performers than any
any other circus in Australia.

A city of snow white tents covering acres of
ground, appearing as a huge blizzard of
gauze.

New Horses, New Performers, New Clowns
Animals from all parts of the world.

Special engagement of HERR MÖHLEN
ADL and his Performing Lions, Tigers,
Leopards, and Bears. Don't fail to see this
wonderful trainer.

Hundreds turned away at Orange Show:
Packed to the doors!

Remember we have no Competitors:

We Stand Alone!

We belong to the People!

We suit the People!

And have the People's Praise!

DON'T FORGET

WEDNESDAY, May 1st, and Show Nights
E. J. CLARK, Representative.

Eroni Bros. Circus
newspaper ad used in
1907. State Library of
New South Wales.

Was there more money
in circus?

"Oh well, there must have been because there was quite a few little circuses. [The] Colleano family was with us, the Eroni brothers, about two years. I don't remember what year but I know I was doing a wire [act] on the circus. Connie was on the wire also. Con would be a bit younger than me I think. All [the] family was in the circus, they was. I tell you, Katie was a little kid. She was [as] black as charcoal, Katie was [a] little Abo. [She] used to run about. Connie's father was a terrible boozer. [He'd] drink like billy-oh and run amok. He used to chase them. Old Con, he was a fighter in his day. Sul-

livan was his right name. He used to put a sidewall up after the circus. They'd have somebody fight in the tent outside. . . . Then they had another cousin with them. They took another little black fella with them, a fella named Jackie Mathews. He used to ride the jumping horses. He was a nephew of Mrs Colleano."

So they had a boxing show with [Eroni's Circus]?

"After the circus finished the circus [audience] come out, and they'd announce it outside. So and so is going to challenge the local champion or something, outside in the tent. That's how the family grew up [and that's how] they started in the circus business. Connie finished up doing the wire instead of me in the circus. I was doing the wire before Con. I was doing wire with Con. [When] we stopped for dinner camp [we'd] put up this little wire. We'd stop for an hour. . . . We used to practise

together and we used to say to one another, you know, do this and do this. And the first thing I done on the low wire was a 'back,' [a] back somersault. Feet to feet. But instead of me hitting the wire, you know, the wire come between me legs. It was only about that high. Instead of closing me legs so I could land back on the wire on me feet, I couldn't do it. I used to land with it between me legs. But, you know, [as we] learnt it, [we] got the balance of it, that's how we come to start to get up high. My wire was about seven foot six high when I started doing [it] in the circus. My wire was twenty eight feet [long], tight, tightwire."

Was Con doing feet-to-feet at that stage?

"Oh yes, Con done it right from the word go."

Backward or forward?

"No, he done it feet-to-feet [backward] first. [He] only [did the] forward later on in years. He was a wirewalker before he started the forward. He also done a flip on a wire. Yes, you know, [a] back flip, on a wire. I remember him quite well. He used to put gloves on. So I started on the wire and I found out the wire was much easier to walk than the rope, because the rope used to roll. Connie never done a row of forwards or anything like that or two or three backs or anything [because he had only] one 'spring' [end] and one 'dead' end. I still stuck to the two springs, a spring on that end and a spring on this end. That's how I used to do a row of forwards at the finish. Once Connie done it, well they all done it after a while, what they called a dead end and only one spring. Yeah, good wirewalker. Good dancer. [In] my day it was Connie. He had a wonderful balance, Connie did. He had his bad nights too, sometimes he'd miss. I reckon he's a top fella meself, Connie."

When Con Colleano was with your family's circus, did you get up to anything as boys? Did you go hunting in the bush? How would you spend your spare time when you weren't practising?

"Pig hunting and kangaroo hunting, mostly in Queensland. [We'd] go out wild duck shooting or anything. Well, we had time in them days to do things. They was all good people [the Colleanos], all good people. But people didn't treat them as Aborigines. . . . Eroni's split up, my father, his father, and his two sisters. They all split up. They say they kicked out on their own. And then Con and that started out with a circus. They started out [as] Colleano's Circus."

At first, young Con assisted George in his wire act by doing comedy. This role consisted of laying out a rope on the floor of the ring below George's wire and mim-

icking George's act.²⁸ So diligent was Con at learning the wire, however, that he would practise during the night in the wild Australian bush with lanterns hung at each end of the wire. Apparently, although George Eroni could show his protégé new tricks at first, Con soon overtook George to the extent that Con began performing on the wire in the Eroni circus in place of George.

Colleano's All-Star Circus

It appears that the Colleano family decided to start off with their own circus not long after young Con had succeeded George Perry as the principal wirewalker in the Eroni circus. The old man Sullivan had probably decided by that time that his family had achieved sufficient proficiency in circus skills for it to strike out on its own. When the Colleano circus did eventually get going, neither the mother nor the father did anything in the way of performing.

Although Collino [sic] Bros. Circus had had tentative beginnings as early as 1910, the successful foundation of the Colleano family circus would appear to date from the [Australian] winter or spring of 1915. Violet Gill said that the Colleanos started out with their own circus "with just a few wagons and horses" from Winton in Central Queensland.²⁹ The earliest known reference to Colleano's All-Star Circus is its appearance in Maryborough, Qld on Saturday 1 January 1916. The circus had travelled from Howard, Torbanlea, Nikenbah and Pialba.³⁰ Several weeks, perhaps months, of travelling would have been needed to travel overland from Winton to these coastal townships, a not impossible itinerary if the Colleano family had started out from Winton during the spring of 1915. The memories of other old circus people also allow us to take some sort of a fix on the approximate date of the founding of the Colleano circus. Madge Seymour, whose family operated a small out-back show between the years 1902 and 1916, remembered as follows: "When they [the Colleanos] started out [with their own circus] we were down in South Australia as a matter of fact. We left Charleville [Qld] in 1910 and went down south and we didn't get back for two or three years. We didn't get back until the war. . . . We came through Broken Hill when the war broke out [in August 1914]. They [the Colleanos] had established themselves while we were down in South Australia. When the war broke out [we were] outside of Broken Hill at Wilcannia. We were working our way back up to Queensland. We showed Broken Hill, we came back through White Cliffs and Tibooburra. I don't know [from] where they started out on their own. When we first met Colleano's we were settled down [in Charle-

ville].³¹ I hadn't known them before then. I'd known of them. Mum and Dad knew them, but I hadn't. They came through Charleville then with their own circus. They came through with the horse [s] and wagons I think the first time."

Who was in Colleano's Circus at that stage, the first time you saw them?

"Connie and Maurice, I think. That's about as far down the family as they went. Katie might have been working. And Winnie but not the younger girls."

Did they have the boxing show with them?

"Not then. Oh no. Just pure circus. Just a small circus."

Did the Colleanos, before they had the circus, go on with the picture showmen and play on the picture shows?



Con's sister Winnie in 1924. Author's collection.

"Not that I know of. I don't think any of the circuses did. We didn't."

[Boxing or] busking?

"Yes, as I say, father would be boxing then. They'd do a bit of busking and gradually work into it a bit at a time. Lots of the circuses started with their people busking, the father and mother and a couple of kids working in the open and collecting. Not boxing, but little circus tricks. It happens like this. There's a man and his wife. They have one child. So they're working with somebody else. They have another child and they start to teach those children. By the time the children are four or five years old they think they can make it on their own. And most of them did. And, of course, they [the Colleanos] had a big family. If you had a big family you were made."

The first time you saw Colleano's, Con was working on the wire?

"Oh yes, yes."

And how was he dressed for his act? Was he wearing his Spanish costume at that stage?

"No, not the first time."

How was he dressed for his costume?

"In satin breeches, stockings and jacket. At that stage I think he concentrated on the slackwire more."

So that means he wouldn't have been doing somersaults?

"Well, not on the slackwire. You wouldn't jump at all. You don't jump on the slackwire. You just do balancing acts . . . but they did a ladder, walked up a side ladder on[to] the slackwire. It was harder than the tightwire really."

One of the people who appears to have been instrumental in the Colleano family's early success was the New York-born Jewish acrobat, Mo Aarons.³² Mo came to Australia late in 1908 as a member of The Five St. Leons, the famous Australian acrobatic troupe that had toured America and Mexico for several years.³³ If Mo Aarons left the St. Leons at Sarina, Qld as Violet Gill had recalled, to join the fledgling Colleano circus, this would again indicate the winter of 1915, when the St Leon circus was touring Queensland. Circus veteran Mervyn King, now 82 years of age, was apprenticed to the St. Leons as a seven year old boy acrobat a few months later, in August or September 1915, as the show was returning south to New South Wales from its tour of Queensland.

Mervyn recalled: "Mo was a knock-about comedy man. He had worked in the St. Leon act in America and that is how he came out here to Australia. He was a very good at what we used to call Arab tumbling. They used to dress up and tumble as Arabs in those days. Regardless of what nationality they were, they always worked as Arabs. Most of the Arab tumblers in America way back were Jewish boys really. They tell the story of one act over there that had been out of work, hadn't had a job for three months. An agent said, 'I got a job for you. You got an act?'³⁴

"'Oh, we can get an act together.' They raced around New York and rounded up a few of the Jewish boy tumblers including Mo."

What's the name of the act?

"Well, we haven't had a feed for three days so why don't you can call it the Hasen Ben Eton troupe."

"It turned out to be a good act. Mo left St. Leon's after he had been with them for quite a while . . . and went with Col-

leano's Circus. That was another famous circus in Australia in those days. Mo practically taught the Colleano family. He was a very good teacher, Mo."

[Was] Mo Aarons with the [St. Leon] show [when you joined]?

"No, Mo had just gone . . . and I think he joined the Colleanos. I seen him on many occasions with Colleano's. If we were near Colleano's, we'd go and have a look at their show. If they were near us they'd have a look at ours. The last place I seen him was at Strathfield.³⁵ Colleano's Circus showed just outside the railway station. There used to be a vacant piece of land there. After that, I never seen him anymore."

Did Mo Aarons teach the Colleanos?

"That was the general rumour. I was very young then. I didn't take that much interest in him. But he got their show on the road. They were small. They used to do a bit of boxing."

Did they sometimes have to defend themselves?

"That used to happen with any circus. We had larrikins in those days, not as bad as they are now and not as nasty but they'd want to tear your tent or look in somewhere. You'd chase them away. There was a certain amount of unemployed also. They wanted to have a fight or something. You'd protect your stuff."

So, who were the best fighters out of the shows?

"I'd say you could pick between the Perrys and the Colleanos. The Colleanos I would say were the most professional [boxers in circus] because of their father. During Mo's stay with the Colleanos they come up with the other shows and probably a little bit better than some of us done. They were an ambitious family and there was a lot of them. That's the key to circus. If you've got a family it's a good living for a family. Where there's a percentage more girls than boys I don't think the girls get too good a go as far as the business end and the cut up with any money. In those days they didn't cut up the money with the family. They just got pocket money. Colleano's [were] early in the piece when I was around. They were just starting. They were getting going then or a little before that but they didn't come into limelight 'til a bit later I think. I can remember Colleano's when it was a going concern but, from history and that handed down, they did have a boxing show [once upon a time]. Old Con run the boxing show but I never ever seen that. The boys, such as Bonar and Connie, not so much Maurice because he was pretty young then, were pretty good boxers. Connie was a good looking fellow and he made sure he didn't get his face marked

up. I seen him sparring and that you know. I'm led to believe that Connie Colleano did win the boxing championship [when he got] on the Ringling show three years running. He'd be a welterweight."

Mervyn's memories of Aarons were echoed by Madge Seymour: "Mo Aarons . . . went with them [the Colleanos] very early. The first time I met them he was with them, but not the last time, not when they were travelling by train. He was a good performer. And I believe a good teacher. He taught the Colleanos their acrobatic work. I suppose Dummy [Perry] was the first person I saw do a 'double back' from the ground, which Maurice Colleano did too. All that I think came from Mo Aaron[s]."³⁶

In those days, there used to be some terrible brawls in the circus because in every town the circus people would strike bullies and antagonistic types. Con's

"Oh, he [Con] could read and write. They didn't have a marvellous education but they could all read and write and add up."

Eric Trevail

brother-in-law poignantly remembered the boxing ability of the Colleanos, Con in particular: "See, the old man had a boxing booth with the circus and Con and Bonar and Maurice and the old man used to have a glove, take a glove sort of thing, and [they would take on] all different weights in the country towns. So, they came up the hard way. Oh, they were deadly, you know. [Con] could fight like a threshing machine. [He was a] very mild person but a tremendous fighter."³⁷

When Colleano's Circus was at its height, they still carried on with the boxing?

"As far as I know. They had a bit of trouble at Liverpool [during the First World War]. That's when the army people came in and there was a helluva riot. They knocked the tent [down]. Somebody passed a remark to Con about one of his sisters and Con flattened him. He hit the bloke and broke the bloke's jaw. I think it was Archie Bradley, I'm not sure, but I know the fellow became lightweight champion, [who] said something to Con. Con fought him bare knuckles and he put Bradley, if it was Bradley, in hospital. [He] gave him the most terrible hiding and Con was so cut and marked about that he had [to] go and do his act as a clown because his face was all cut about. You know, [he] couldn't wear make-up."

Australian circus life was "not all beer and skittles" related one showman near the turn of the century. For a small family circus such as Colleano's, the struggle

was so much the greater to establish a name and reputation for itself. In order to survive, the Colleanos occasionally had to amalgamate with other small troupes, including picture showmen, as this brief report from the *Western Champion* of Barcaldine in Central Queensland of 22 April 1916 relates: "Mr. Nash has the pictures all on his own and has been showing at both the Glideo and the Lyric. On Saturday the big bill at the Glideo drew a very large crowd although the tariff had been doubled. In addition to The Million Dollar Mystery, the interest in which increases in intensity, there was an excellent circus troupe of some half dozen who went through remarkable balancing, acrobatic, wirewalking and trapeze feats. They were among the best we have ever seen."

For a time, during 1916, there was a reversion to the name of Sullivan. Australia's leading circus historian, Fred Braid, has found mention of Sullivan's Circus at Ayr, North Queensland on 20 September 1916.³⁸ But soon the Colleano pseudonym was employed again and retained thereafter. By early 1917, the circus was well and truly advertised as Colleano's All-Star Circus. It was then travelling south through Queensland to the northern districts of New South Wales. Announced as "not the biggest but the best," Colleano's All-Star Circus visited the Queensland town of Roma on 10 February 1917.³⁹ The company included: The Five Royal Hawaiians; Mo Aarons; Senorita Sanchez; Zeneto; Marasetta Sisters and Miss Katherine.

Con appears to have worked under the pseudonym of Zeneto early in his wirewalking career. In those days Con, his brothers and sisters donned special names for the circus bills, an expedient that was commonly used by a small family circus to inflate the real size of its programme and company. When Con later perfected his act for the vaudeville stage, his fiancée, Winnie Trevail, also worked with him in a wire routine and used the name of Zeneto herself. Miss Katherine, a lady back and forward somersault rider, was probably Con's younger sister, Kate, the Colleano sister who George Perry described as being "as black as charcoal." The show also carried a couple of high jump horses including Black Jack, purchased by the Colleanos for 100 guineas. The Roma newspaper, *The Western Star*, of 10 February 1917 reported: "Of its kind, the show is one of the best witnessed in Roma for many years. . . . The ladder balancing performance by the Royal Hawaiian Troupe was very clever and skillful, and some

splendid items were given by the Colleano family of acrobats. . . . The proprietors are to be congratulated on the excellent programme they present to their patrons."

The movement and direction in which an Australian outback circus headed was governed as much by the richness of grasses and warmth of climate as by the financial suitability of one route compared with another. Outback circus business was usually an up and down affair. Two or three thousand pounds of clear profit earned from a successful run could be dissipated in a few weeks if a bad run of townships and localities was encountered. Putting a shoulder to the wheel was more than just a term of speech: the circus people often had to jump out of their wagons and add their strength to that of their four legged servants to haul their wagons over a steep hill, over perilously soft black soil country or across deep flooded rivers in outback Australia. Con's brother-in-law, Eric Trevail, recalled: "Con was a great bushman, [a] terrific shot, and [he could] live off the land all his life. You and I would starve and he'd be eating good food. He knew how to catch fish. He knew everything about the Australian bush. If you wanted a witchety grub, he'd say, 'Don't dig there, there's ants, dig here.' You'd get your witchety grub and then he'd bait it [for you] and you'd [catch] a Murray cod. [That] came from the circus [life] because they had to live off the land. They were [once] bogged down [in] the blacksoil country out near Hay and Booligal. [They] couldn't move the circus and they used to have to go and shoot rabbits. Con said he ate rabbit seventeen different ways. He said, 'I got that bloody sick of rabbits. We had [them] all ways, fricaseed, baked and. . . .' He said he'd eaten every [type of] bird, galahs, emu leg steaks. He said they had to. They were starving out on these plains, bogged down. They were pretty tough old days for them. He and his brother Maurice would go shooting. They didn't have a proper rifle, just a hammer. Con would aim and Maurice would have to hit the hammer."⁴⁰

The Colleano family coped with these tribulations and more, all the time travelling by day and performing by night. As the years passed and the family grew, the Colleano children continued to learn between them most of the necessary circus skills so that the family did not have to rely so heavily upon engaged artists. Nor was a basic education, in the normal

sense of the term, overlooked. Eric Trevail went on to say: "Oh, he could read and write. They didn't have a marvellous education but they could all read and write and add up. There was a little story about that too. When they had the circus going and all the young kids were coming along and were learning their various acts, the school inspectors used to [come] around to see whether the children were neglected in the circus. [Mrs. Colleano] kept the children spotlessly clean. [When] the inspectors came round they talked to the

went on, Con would come down and play the trombone in the orchestra."

Colleano's All-Star Circus had reached Condobolin in mid-western New South Wales by the winter of 1917, where it played opposition to the Gus St. Leon Great United Circus during the local show week. The show at this stage featured Senorita Sanchez [Winnie Colleano] as Queen of the Air, Mo Aarons as "America's most versatile artist in his Dive for Life," the Marasetta Sisters, double trapeze artists, Harold Lloyd, a bounding jockey rider, and The Hawaiian Band. The long and favourable report that appeared in the local newspaper, *The Lachlander* of 25 July 1917 included the observation that: "Another clever act is performed by by Zeneto, the wire walker and tight rope artist, who in addition to numerous and clever feats, turns a complete somersault and lands with his feet on the wire."

Con's complete somersault at this stage was the backward somersault. Although he was undoubtedly experimenting at this stage with the forward somersault, it would be some time before he perfected this more difficult trick. *Australian Variety* magazine of 2 November 1917 also published news of the Condobolin season, saying that Colleano's Circus "catered for Condobolin people for huge cash. St. Leon's circus also drew spendid crowds."

Colleano's All-Star Circus was well on the road to success by 1917 and a year later was sufficiently prosperous to travel the immense state of Queensland by its own special train. The only other circus in Australia to travel regularly by rail at that stage was the country's largest, Wirth's. Reported *Australian Variety* of 11 October, 1918: "[Colleano's Circus] now travels Queensland by special train. This combination is not the biggest in Australia, but for its size, it is easily one of the most consistently successful. It is said that nature gives us the right to dream; whether you turn that dream to good sometimes lies with oneself. The Colleano family have worked laboriously to achieve fame, and now their dream of ambition is being fulfilled. They have a band of 14 performers, a programme of 27 artists and a fine lot of animals. The 'big top' is a picture of loveliness and has a fine electric lighting system installed. The show will be at Alpha today, and will move on to Alice, Barcaldine, and Ilfracombe, getting to Longreach on the 23rd."

The interior Queensland railway network is a peculiar series of dead-end

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Colleano's All-Star Circus newspaper ad used in Dubbo. State Library of South Wales.

children and also examined their clothing and they got a wonderful report back."

When the family circus seemed solidly established Con chose to specialise in his wire performance alone but at one stage, he had nine different roles to play in the circus including those of wirewalker, bareback rider, flying trapeze artist, balancing ladder performer and tumbler, in addition to playing trombone in the circus band. With his younger brother Maurice, he performed a bounding double jockey act. Said Eric Trevail: "Maurice was a terrific tumbler and also horseback rider. They'd all ride the horses. They'd spring from the ground onto their backs and do a back somersault on their backs and, you know, those usual circus tricks."

Bonar Colleano learned the cornet from old Stan Gill in Rowan Bros circus. Katie Colleano played the bass according to Madge Seymour. Young Con was taught to read music by Brigalo Young, a clarinet player in the Colleano circus band, but played the trombone badly according to Eric Trevail. "[It] wasn't much of a band but it was alright for out in the bush. The [Colleano] girls [played] while [Con's] act was going on. Then, when the girls' act

lines, each of which stretch from the main coastal line inland. Australian circuses that used the Queensland rail network had to be prepared to use alternative transport means to travel from one terminus to the next. Madge Seymour recalled that the Colleano circus would "go up north on the train. They'd go out to Blackall and then cross by road to the next terminus, which was Charleville and then go down that line. You see, they crossed from line to line. They'd go down. They'd go out to Goondiwindi line and cross overland to the Moree line. That's the way they worked it. They had a few motors but not enough to transport the lot. They used to do back and forward trips, or get a carrier to take the heavy stuff across. Oh, yes Colleano's was quite big. Not as big as Wirth's, but as big as Perry's. They had plenty of horses but no menagerie."

Mervyn King remembers seeing the Colleano circus at Strathfield, a suburb of Sydney, about 1919: "The only time I seen Colleano's Circus was at Strathfield. Syl and Reg [St. Leon] and I went out because we were working vaudeville at the Clay circuit and that night was off. They were showing just off the Strathfield railway station on a piece of ground there. Mo Aarons was with the Colleanos then."⁴¹

What do you remember about their programme that night that you saw them at Strathfield?

"Their acrobatic act was good and their flying act was, for those days, good. Connie and his elder brother, Bonar, did the wire. Bonar done the comedy and he wasn't a bad wirewalker either, Bonar. Connie wasn't doing no forward or back somersaults then I don't think. He wasn't doing any forwards then anyhow, I'm sure of that. He looked about eighteen if I remember rightly. They did a teeterboard acrobatic act with a risley board in the middle. You somersault from that end of the board up onto this and the chaps land on the pad."

What did Con do on the wire then?

"Oh, dancing. He didn't do the full somersault and strip the pants off or anything then. Bonar was the better wire walker of the two then."

Then?

"Yes. Connie took it up seriously eventually and Bonar done the comedy for it. He altered his dress. Well, then, Alby Perry started wire too. Then Colleano's



Colleano with Sole's & Colleano's Circus in 1922. Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Center, Melbourne, Australia.

and Perry's had almost identical wire acts."

Colleano's All-Star Circus was at its peak in the period 1918-22. By early 1922 the show relied upon an electric lighting plant (when most Australian outback circuses still used a carbide lighting system). This was run by means of a large traction engine that was also used for general carting the ever increasing circus.⁴²

Young Con

Young Con practiced on the wire up to seven hours a day. He had no other wirewalker to model himself upon and so continued to teach himself in what was perhaps the hardest way possible, on a bounding tightwire and without the aid of any balancing device. Not only does this wire sway back and forth but it is

also capable of seriously injuring an inexperienced performer if he is too stiff-legged.

Probably the only serious rival that Con had in those days was Alby Perry of Perry Bros. Circus family. There is the suggestion even that Alby, four years Con's junior, may have perfected the feet-to-fee forward somersault before Con himself achieved the trick. Mervyn King recalled him.

Was Alby [Perry] doing his wire walking act [at that time]?

"Yes, he did his wire act."

What was his wire act like?

"Good, [a] good wire act. Alby done everything that Connie done. He didn't do 'forwards' every night but if somebody he knew was in the audience he'd do one then. He'd let it go for six months. Then they'd say, 'Connie Colleano is in the show.' He'd go and do two 'forwards' probably. That was the strange part about it. They're tricks you've got to keep [practising] on otherwise you loose them. He used to take some 'busters.' He used to get those 'skinners' up the chest. There was nothing wrong with [Alby's] wire. He could get back and forth and that but with all due respects to Alby, I think Connie had the edge on him because [Connie] started to put more into . . . style, although not at that particular time."

It took Con about five years to perfect the feet-to-fee forward somersault on the wire, a feat that was thought impossible at the time because, in turning, the performer loses sight of the wire. The performer's feet have to find the wire without the aid of the eyes, whereas in the backward somersault the performer's eyes sight the wire a split second before alighting on it. Con just went on practising until, finally, one summer afternoon in Sydney in 1919 he brought off the fabulous somersault, probably the first time it had ever been achieved on a wire (as distinct from a rope) and probably the first time by anyone except for the legendary Pablo Fanque.⁴³ Con still missed the wire in two out of three attempts. Each time this happened the bounding wire, stretched to a resistance of almost one tonne, was liable to lash out and break every bone in his body. Sometimes the wire caught him under the arm and paralysed it for days. Other times, if he hit the wire with his heels, he would be catapulted into the air again and fall to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Eventually, long experience aided by a sixth perceptory sense that he developed taught his feet to find the wire nearly every time.

The trick nevertheless remained a highly dangerous one, too dangerous to be at-

tempted in the tense atmosphere of a public audience, and for a long time it was the backward somersault that still remained the climax of his act. But even this was enough to stir the hearts of his audiences and bring them to the edge of their seats, and not all of them were simple country folk either. "[Colleano's Circus] have in Zeneto a wire act performer good enough for any vaudeville bill. His Excellency, The Governor [of South Australia] and his wife visited the show on Friday evening and after witnessing Zeneto do his back somersault feat on the wire rose from their seats and went over and personally congratulated him."⁴⁴

The evidence suggests that Con had perfected the feet-to-foet forward somersault for public performance on the vaudeville circuits before departing Australia in the early 1920's to seek fame and fortune overseas. It was then that the realisation came upon him that he had originated a style on the wire that had never been seen before.

Footnotes

1. Winnie Colleano [1900-1986] interview.
2. Madge Seymour [1902-] interview.
3. Historical Feature, *Daily Mirror*, 3 September 1979, page 30. The author of this article had gathered his information from Con's widow, the late Mrs. Winnie Colleano.
4. George Perry [1896-1989] interview. Perry was known in circus by his professional pseudonym of George Eroni.
5. NSW Registrar-General records.
6. Information from Fred Braid, Ballina, NSW. Mr. Braid has been described as Australia's leading circus historian.
7. Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country - Australia in the Victorian Age*.
8. The marriage Con Sullivan and Julia Robertson is recorded at Entry No 5188 in the NSW Registrar-General's Department. Their children were Elgar J. ("Bonar," born at Narrabri on 29 December 1895), Emily Winifred ("Little Winnie," born at Lismore, NSW on 13 June 1897), Cornelius ("Con," jnr, born at Lismore on 26 December 1899), Catherine Julia ("Kate," born

cr. 1901), Maurice Daniel (born at Narrabri on 28 April 1904), Virginia May (born at Narrabri on 13 May 1906), Coralie Victorine (born at Narrabri or Lismore on 17 June 1908), Thelma Joyce (born at Narrabri on 20 November 1910), Victoria H. (known as "Babe," born circa 1912), and Victor (known as Lindsay, born in New South Wales on 20 April 1917). This information was extracted from the files of the NSW Registrar-General. Old Con Sullivan apparently died "in the USA" on 15 November 1952. The birth of Cornelius Sullivan is recorded at Entry No. 4386/6 in the NSW Registrar-General's Department.

9. Biographical note, courtesy late Mrs. Winne Colleano, reproduced in *Australian Circus Reminiscences*, pages 217-8.
10. *Daily Mirror*, 3 September 1979, p. 30..
11. *Ibid*.
12. Dot Lennon, interview.
13. Information from Fred Braid.
14. *Daily Mirror*, *op.cit*.
15. Letter to author from Mark Colleano, London, 23 November 1987. Mark is a nephew of Con Colleano.
16. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December 1897.
17. George Perry interview.
18. Interview by the author with Violet Gill, reproduced partially in *The Circus in Australian*, pages 58-9.
19. *Corowa Free Press*, August 1911.
20. *Hillston Spectator*, December 1912.
21. Biographical note, courtesy late Mrs. Winne Colleano, reproduced in *Australian Circus Reminiscences* pages 217-8.
22. The family of Jim Ashton, incidentally, not his younger brother, Fred Ashton, who is the great-grandfather of the family which presently conducts Ashton's Circus.
23. Violet Gill interview.
24. *Mount Morgan Chronicle*, July 1914.
25. George Perry interview.
26. From a rough note in the Colleano papers.
27. The earliest known references to Perry Bros. Circus, as a circus in its own right, date from early 1914, after which it was conducted as a separate enterprise from the main Perry family circus, Eroni Bros.
28. Fred Maynard interview.
29. Violet Gill interview.
30. *Maryborough Chronicle*, 1 January 1916.
31. The Seymours settled in Charleville, Qld during the winter of 1916, at which time the Colleano circus was known to be travelling Northern Queensland.
32. Mo's full name was Moses Aarons. The name is sometimes written as Moe Aaron.
33. On their return to Australia, the Five St. Leons, comprised three sons of Gus St. Leon (a brother of the Walter St Leon mentioned earlier in this article), Mo

Aarons as acrobatic clown and Georgie Smith as top-mounter.

34. Mervyn King [1908-], *Australian Circus Reminiscences*. An edited version of Mervyn's memories were published in paperback form by Butterfly Books Pty Ltd., Springwood NSW in October 1990 as *The Silver Road: The Life of Mervyn King, Circus Man*, as told to Mark St. Leon.
35. Strathfield is a major suburb and railway junction of Sydney.
36. Madge Seymour interview.
37. Eric Trevail interview.
38. Information from Fred Braid.
39. *The Western Star*, February 1917.
40. Eric Trevail interview.
41. Mervyn King interview.
42. *Australian Variety*, 29 March 1922.
43. *Daily Mirror*, *op. cit*. The real name of Pablo Fanque was William Darby. He came to the Australian colonies, probably in late 1854. His inaugural appearance with a new circus establishment in Melbourne called Astley's Amphitheatre (named after the famous London venue) was announced in *The Age* of 1 January 1855. Pablo Fanque, the advertisement said, was "the First Rope Dancer in the World" (the word "first" meaning "leading" or "premiere") and that he would "throw back and forward somersets [sic], feet to feet, on the tightrope, a feat which astonishes those in the profession much more than those who pay to visit the arena." An advertisement in *The Age* of 23 January 1855 might just as well have been referring to Con Colleano himself when it spoke of Pablo Fanque as "The incomparable tightrope dancer. . . . The style, spirit and gracefulness of this performer have been both the theme of universal admiration, combining the finest effects of the poetry of motion, with the most daring feats of aerial somersaulting." Pablo Fanque, a Negro, was born in Norwich, England and apprenticed to the circus proprietor William Batty at an early age. After coming to Australia, Pablo remained here for some years, even conducting his own circus at one stage, peculiarly called the Alhambra Waggish Marquee. His career in Australia was marked by occasional scuffles with the law. His performance with the American Circus at Camperdown, Sydney on 6 July 1865 is his last known appearance as a tightrope walker in Australia. In the late 1860s he is supposed to have entered the hotel trade. He returned to England in about 1870 and was apparently conducting a circus at the time of his death at Stockport in 1871. His age at death was variously described as being either 67 or 75, both probably being over-estimations. Information from Thomas Frost, *Circus Life & Circus Celebrities*, London, 1875; and from Fred Braid.
44. *Everyone's*, 4 January 1922.

W A N T E D !

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ARCHIVES OF JUGGLING
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Since the first elephant arrived on our shores on April 13, 1796 men have devoted their lives to handling and training these great beasts. Men like Orrin Townsend, Stuart Carven, George Arstingstall, Chris Zeitz, Bill Emory and Louis Reed are just a few outstanding examples of this breed of men. One man however, stood apart from all others. His accomplishments are legendary. That man was Cheerful Gardner. His nickname hardly fit his solemn personality, but he commanded the respect of all who knew him. It can be truthfully said, there will never be another like him.

Frank "Cheerful" Gardner was born in Janesville, Wisconsin, where his mother ran a drug store. In 1903 he journeyed to Baraboo, Wisconsin and joined the menagerie department of the Ringling Bros. Circus. His humble start began with camels, but he soon was working with the elephants. The following year he was with the Carl Hagenbeck Wild Animal Show appearing at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. Here he performed the elephant head carry for the first time. This show became the Carl Hagenbeck Circus in 1905 and Gardner went along with the elephant department. The 1905 and 1906 tours were unsuccessful, and the owners sold their interest to Ben Wallace, who combined it with his show. The Carl Hagenbeck-Great Wallace Circus took the

Frank "Cheerful" Gardner around 1918. Pfening Archives.



CIRCUS WILD ANIMAL TRAINERS

Cheerful Gardner

BY BILL JOHNSON

road in 1907 with Percy Phillips as elephant superintendent. In 1908 and 1909 Gardner worked an end ring of elephants for him.

He left in 1909 to join the J. E. Henry Dog and Pony Circus where he handled a huge elephant named Jip. This massive elephant carried the show band on her back in the street parade.

From 1911 through 1914 Gardner toured with the Sun Bros. Circus performing with their two elephants, Alice and Etta.

A *Billboard* item dated July 22, 1911 read: "Cheerful Gardner and his coterie of acting elephants are making a decided hit

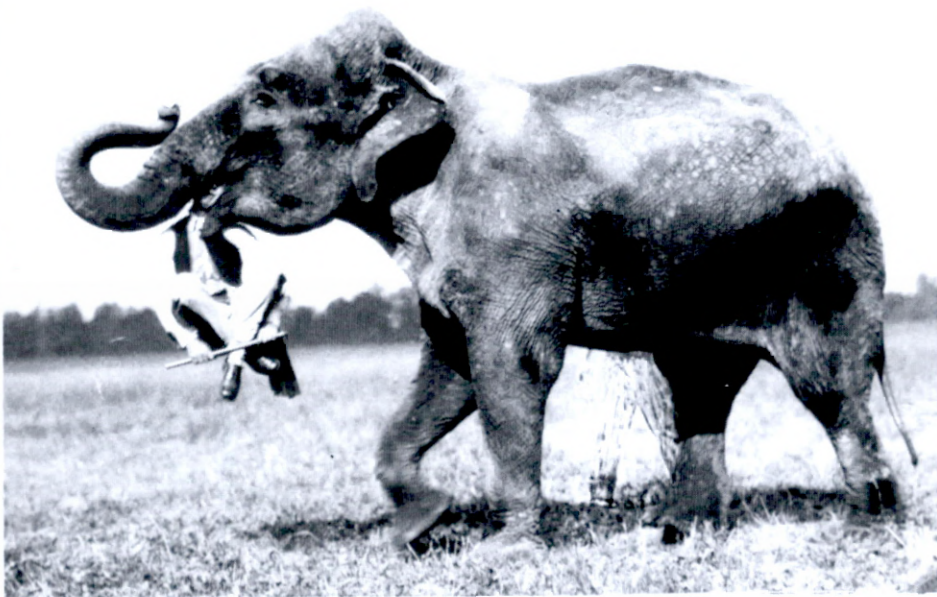
at every performance of the Sun Bros. Circus."

Another note in the *Billboard* stated: "Cheerful Gardner, the well known animal man, recently with Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, is spending the winter in Valdosta, Georgia, in company with Dan R. Lewis, last season with the 101 Ranch show. They are breaking a new baboon act consisting of new and larger feats to be featured with one of the larger circuses this year."

In 1915 Cheerful Gardner moved over to Jones Bros. Circus operated by J. Augustus Jones. Here he handled a fine trio of elephants, Myrtle, Bonnie and Babe. Jones used the Cole Brothers title in 1916 and 1917. The show wintered in Riverside, California, from December 1916 to March 1917. When it opened in Riverside on April 3rd a young local woman joined out. She thereafter became Mrs. Babe Gardner.

In February 1918 the Jones elephants were auctioned off at Shreveport, Louisiana to Charles Sparks. Following the auction Gardner signed up with Andrew Downie for his Walter L. Main Circus. This show had three elephants, females Babe and Louie, and a male Chief. Chief and Babe had been on Downie's LaTena show. Chief would die in three years, and Babe and Louie would be joined by

Gardner and his famous head carry with Babe in the 1920s. McCarter collection.



females Carrie and Jean, and a male, Joe. These five became the famous 101 Ranch herd.

In 1919 Gardner became menagerie superintendent on the Al G. Barnes Wild Animal Circus. Sidney Rink still had the elephants that season but was his last. The herd in 1919 consisted of Ruth, Babe, Jewel, Pearl and two young males, Vance and Barney. Late that season a female, Mabel, was acquired from William P. Hall of Lancaster, Missouri. Originally on the Glasscock Shows, she toured with Howes Great London 1911-16, then a year with J. Augustus Jones. Joe Metcalf had her on the Howard Bros. Circus in 1918. She was on the LaMont Show in 1919, then to Hall before coming to Barnes. Her name was changed to Jenny, and she was teamed with the veteran Babe.

That summer Barnes also bought Lotus, a large hippopotamus, from James Patterson. Gardner trained her first to lead, then broke her in harness to pull an elaborate cart in the show spectacle. In 1920 he took over the elephant herd. Bill Woodcock, later a great elephant man himself, joined the show that year.

When the show played Minneapolis, Minnesota in July 1921 a memorable event occurred when a huge male elephant named Ned arrived from the M. L. Clark show. He had trouped for years with this wagon show walking overland from town to town. He had grown to tremendous size and developed an impressive set of ivory. The bull was renamed Tusko, and remained in the menagerie for the rest of that season.

In the March 1941 *Travel* Gardner told of Tusko: "As for Tusko the Great, I bought this grand creature for the Al G. Barnes Circus from the M. L. Clark wagon show for \$6,000. He never ran away while we had him, but he could walk backwards as fast as some elephants could move forward. He was so big—he weighted a little over five tons—we carried him in a special oversized car built by the Erie railroad. Tusko finally became unmanageable. He killed his keepers. He uprooted railroad ties used to pen him up. Finally he was sold to an exhibitor in Oregon for



Gardner with Myrtle, Bonnie and Babe on Jones Bros. Circus in 1915. Author's collection.

\$200, and died in disgrace seven years ago at the comparatively young age of fifty.

"But I don't blame Tusko for his criminal acts. I haven't the slightest doubt that the fact he was denied a mate caused an ulcer to form on his brain, and the pressure drove him crazy at times."

During the winter of 1921-22, the Barnes animals were involved in making the serial film *In the Shadow of the Jungle* at Warner Bros. studios.

A look at the rundown of the 1922 Al G. Barnes program gives an idea of Gardner's versatility.

In display one he reared two ponies on their hind legs the entire length of the hippodrome track. Display four saw

Gardner and Major on the John Robinson Circus. Author's collection.

him handling two elephants and a Shetland pony. Following in display five he worked an elephant and small horse. In display fourteen he commanded the entire herd on the hippodrome track, while dog and goat acts performed in the rings.

The elephant number had Gardner working seven elephants in a fast routine in ring one, while Clyde "Highpockets" Baudendistel worked the huge Tusko in ring two. At the same time Margaret Thompson put three male lions through a routine with a horse in the big cage, and some clowns cavorted with an ostrich on the hippodrome track. Quite a display. Tusko only did four tricks, but his appearance drew audience attention.

At Sedro-Wooley, Washington on May 15, 1922 Tusko took his first unscheduled walk. Cheerful and his hands, along with two elephants, followed behind as Tusko headed north, out of town. He upset trees, telephone poles and fences as he moved along.

After knocking over a chicken coop, and a Model-T Ford, he toppled a railroad switchman in his shanty. The big tusker covered thirty miles that night, and was finally caught the next morning. No one was hurt except Al G. Barnes who had damage claims for nearly \$20,000.00 to pay.

When the season ended Gardner and Baudendistel left the show. There had been talk of their going to Africa to bring back a shipment of twenty-seven baby African elephants, but that deal never materialized. Instead they went to Montgomery, Alabama during the winter of 1922-23 where the John Robinson Circus was wintering.

They were hired to put together a group of elephants for that circus using some of the Barnes show routines.

Larry Davis had just arrived from Peru, Indiana, with three John Robinson elephants, Dutch, Blanche, and Betty. He returned to Peru with two male elephants, Danny and Toto. With Dutch, Blanche and Betty, Gardner added Lizzie from Howes Great London; Mary and Katy from Yankee Robinson and four former Gollmar elephants, Modoc, Jewel, Pearl and Judy.



In the spring of 1923 the Sells Floto Circus was preparing to leave for its opener at the Chicago Coliseum. Major, a big tusker, took a swing at show manager Zack Terrell, with the result that Major became Gardner's baby on the John Robinson show. The Robinson show moved north to Peru, and there, he decided to leave Katy out, because of some physical infirmities. Two punks, Jenny and Ruth, were added, and this brought his herd to twelve in number. With several youngsters in this herd, it could have meant a season of trouble, but credit must go the master for an uneventful tour in 1923.

During the winter of 1924-25 the John Robinson herd was switched with the Hagenbeck-Wallace bulls and Gardner went with them. He remained as the Hagenbeck elephant boss through the 1935 season.

By 1924 Mary was gone and Gardner brought back Katy. Two Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants, Margaret and Bessie, were added. Gardner changed Bessie's name to Babe and trained her for the head carry. In this "human pendulum" act Babe would move down the hippodrome track carrying Gardner in her mouth. Then on command she would stop and rear on her hind legs with him still in her mouth.

Gardner and twenty-six Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants in front of Yankee Stadium in New York City on June 22, 1933. Kelty photo from the Pfening Archives.



Gardner in his dressing wagon on Hagenbeck around 1928. Pfening Archives.

swinging in a circle. It was a dangerous, but spectacular feat.

The American Circus Corporation owned the Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson and Sells-Floto circuses and over the years elephants were shuffled between the shows. Babe, the head carrying standby, remained to the end with Gardner.

On April 5, 1926 the Sells Floto and Ha-

genbeck-Wallace elephants herds were combined for the spring opener at the Chicago Coliseum. For a publicity stunt twenty-four elephants were taken into Chicago's Loop at the noon hour. With so many hair-triggered bulls in this group it seemed suicidal, but Gardner was in charge and it went off without a hitch. After that date the Hegenbeck herd returned to Peru for their opener on April 26th.

The Sells Floto herd made headlines that year, first at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on August 2nd. A barking dog was given as the reason for the herd breaking loose at the railroad station. They did some damage before they were rounded up, but two days later at Calgary they stampeded again. This time they were brought under control and were hustled to the lot without any major incidents. But the worse was yet to come. At Cranbrook, British Columbia on August 5th the herd was standing quietly alongside the circus train after being unloaded. Without warning they began to trumpet loudly and then ran off in a panic. In a few hours all but five were recaptured.

Gardner left the Hagenbeck-Wallace show at Wichita, Kansas on August 10th to join in the hunt. After a plane flight to Denver and a train journey to Cranbrook, he arrived on August 13th. The elephant Tillie was caught on August 15th. Using her as a decoy Gardner, along with elephant men James Dooley, Spot Griffin,



CHEERFUL GARDNER AND HIS BULLS
HAGENBECK-WALLACE CIRCUS—YANKEE STADIUM IN BACKGROUND
JUNE 22, 1933

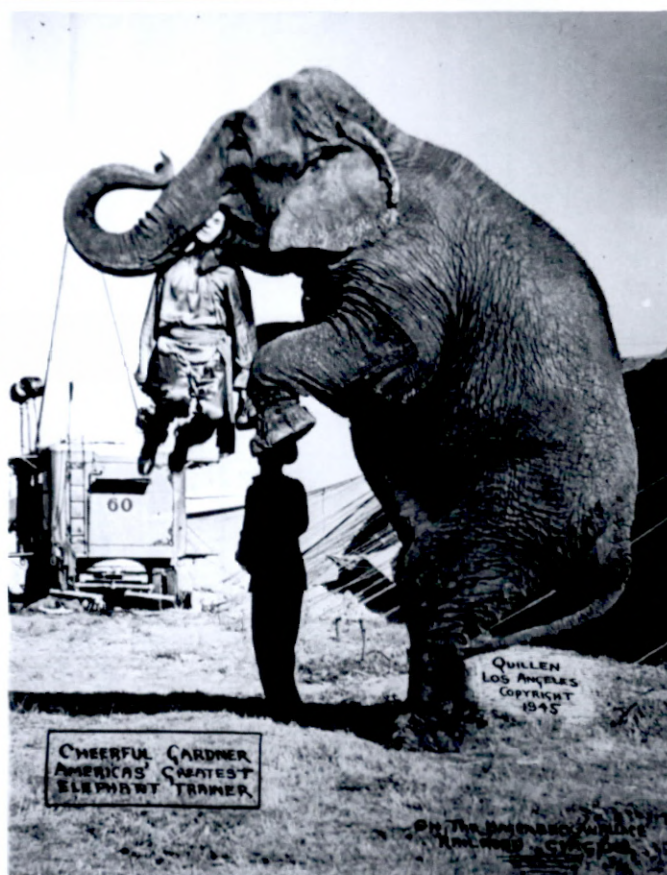
Eddie Thomas, Ralph Davis and H. B. Clark camped out in the woods with Tillie. They had no luck that night. Gardner could not stay with the hunters for long, re-joining his show at Greeley, Colorado on August 21st. When he left only Myrtle and Charlie Ed were still at large. Myrtle was recaptured on September 8th in terrible condition and had to be put down. The last Sells Floto truant, Charlie Ed, was caught on September 14th after thirty nine days of freedom.

Gardner gave this version of his involvement with the Floto elephants in the 1941 *Travel* article: "Another time dispatches told of sixteen 'crazy elephants stampeding through the Canadian wilds.' They weren't crazy, they weren't even mildly insane, unless fright qualifies as insanity. I was in Wichita, Kansas with the Hagenbeck show when a telegram came asking me to fly to Cranbrook, British Columbia to round them up and bring them back to the circus.

"On reaching Cranbrook, I asked what caused the stampede. 'Three days earlier,' one of the keepers told me, 'a goat scared them at Edmonton. When we pulled into Cranbrook, a team ran over some tin cans alongside the track.' That was the answer. All sixteen had simply fled from fright. Four weeks later, with the aid of Indian trackers and several airplane survey flights, we rounded up the last one."

Three animal barns at Peru, with so many circuses wintering there, were an animal man's paradise. During the winter of 1926-27 there were sixty-five camels on hand. Gardner, along with Joe Metcalf, had fifty elephants in training. At Peru on January 25, 1932 Clyde Beatty was working in the training barn with his big male lion Nero. Suddenly the big cat attacked him and brought him to the ground. Only the quick intervention of Gardner and some hands prevented the lion from doing fatal injury to Beatty.

Many examples of his understanding of elephants can be cited. In his Hagenbeck-Wallace herd was a Asian female named Trilby. She was considered dangerous by the elephant hands, that is, until Gardner came along. He discovered she was blind in one eye. When anyone approached from her blind side, she was protective, making aggressive and defensive moves. Gardner made friends with her by coming along her right side so she could get a good look. Before long whenever he came near she would start chirping and wrap her trunk around his neck, draw him to



Gardner doing his head carry on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1938. Circus World Museum collection.

her and lick his face. Cheerful's way with elephants was uncanny.

It was said he could stand a great distance away and call his bulls to him and they would then pull up their stakes and run to him.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace herd reached its peak in 1934 with twenty-nine. During the winter of 1934-35 Gardner broke some harness elephants for the Ringling-Barnum show. He left the Hagenbeck-Wallace show at the end of the 1935 season, but returned in 1937 when Howard Y. Bary took out the show. During the 1936 season he was on Russell Bros. Circus handling their four elephants Elsie, Margaret, Rubber and Sadie.

In 1937 a MGM movie production unit joined the Hagenbeck show to shoot scenes for the film *Here Today and Gone Tomorrow*. The elephant Lizzie was featured with Gardner. This film was never released.

The end for Hagenbeck-Wallace came at Riverside, California in 1938, a fateful year for many circuses. The elephant herd was moved to the old Al G. Barnes winter quarters at Baldwin Park, California and Gardner went with them. Some of these

elephants were later exchanged with the Ringling-Barnum herd and Gardner had some on a couple of short run shows, Great American in 1939 and Jimmy Woods' Yankee Patter-son in 1941.

During their stay at Baldwin Park many of these elephants were employed by movie studios. For a Tarzan film at the MGM Studios Gardner and Lizzie and the herd created a stampede through a pygmy village for a very exciting scene. During his tenure at Baldwin Park the male elephant Ringling Joe was executed in 1940. Joe had come to California in 1934 for work on the film *Clive of India* and never left. Over the years Gardner appeared in twenty films.

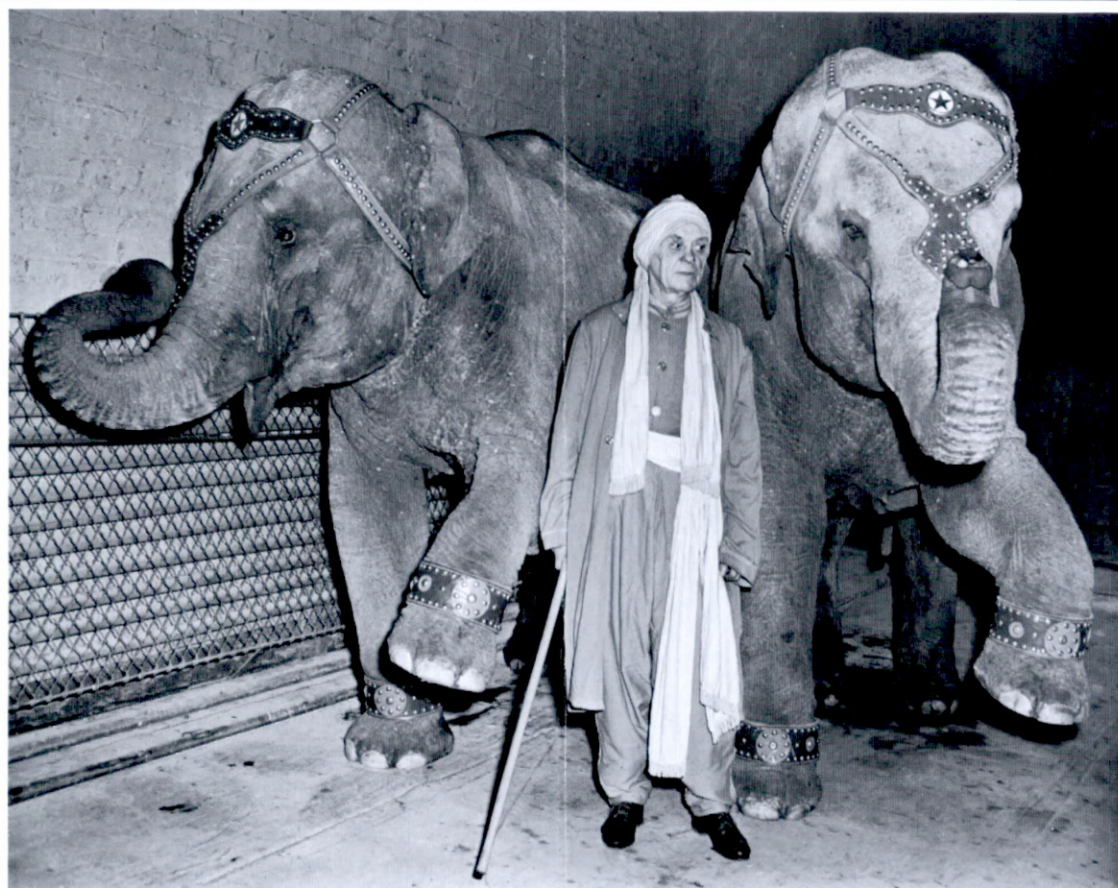
Gardner's old friend Highpockets Baudindstal became concerned about Cheerful's lack of work with the elephants at Baldwin Park. On July 8, 1940 Baudindstal wrote an open letter to the Ringling management and sent a copy to W. H. Honenadel editor of *White Tops* for publication. It read: "Take and [sic] old timers experience to

task. The biggest mistake in elephant history is the day you put Cheerful Gardner on the reserve list for he is first and most active elephant trainer of today. Ralph J. Clawson placed the H & W elephants 65 miles from the city of Los Angeles where they would not get work because the trucking is to [sic] high in this state. The bookers won't pay it and Mr. Louie Goble has elephants of his own. So he books his first of course. If these elephants were in Culver City they would get plenty of work. Mr. Gardner played the 4th of July show in this city [Camarillo, California] and stopped the show with his act. The audience was seventy thousand strong so he must have something.

"We of the circus world hate to see such genius and knowledge go to waste 65 miles from a good booker. Not only for the Ringland [sic] North boys but for the most faithful and competent trainer of the times who can break and train circles around the rest of them.

"P. S. Please make my letter available to all circus people. We of the circus owe Cheerful Gardner that much. Thank you." Honenadel did not publish the letter.

On January 2, 1942 the twelve remaining elephants at Baldwin Park were shipped to Sarasota, Florida. These were Bingo, Fannie, Jessie, Juno, Vic, Margaret, Pinto Nellie, Rosie, Wallace Modoc, Wallace Babe and Mable. Mabel was a saucy



old elephant who had killed George Page at Des Moines, Iowa on the last tour of the Hagenbeck show. In 1943 she was in Jimmy Reynolds' five act on Spangles, the Ringling summer circus in New York's Madison Square Garden. However she remained bad and was executed on March 31, 1944.

Gardner was elephant and menagerie superintendent on the Russell Bros Circus in 1943. This herd included Elsie, Daisy, Dixie, Margaret, Myrtle and Lucy. Lucy was a dangerous elephant and the next year on Russell Bros.-Clyde Beatty she killed Gabe Tucker at Chehalis, Washington on July 13th. Her career took her to the Dailey Bros. Circus and Circo Union in Mexico where she died in a truck wreck. The other elephants on Russell Bros. Circus went to the Kelly-Miller Circus in 1946.

Gardner took over the six elephants on Arthur Bros. Circus in 1945. Here he commanded a mixed group of old and young bulls, Wilhemina, Gentry Babe, Vera, Shirley, Bunny and India. Wilhemina was an old Ringling elephant dating from the turn of the century. She died in Thousand Oaks, California in 1951. Her age was estimated at 71. If correct, she would hold the longevity record for Asian elephants in this country. Gentry Babe arrived in the United States in 1900 from the Carl Hagenbeck Zoo in Germany. She died in

Cheerful Gardner on Polack Bros. Circus western unit in Chicago, Illinois in the spring of 1946. Pfening Archives.

Bloomington, California in April 1967 at age 69. Vera, also known as Big Bingo, was an old Robbins Bros. Circus elephant. This was to be her last season as she died at Grand Forks, North Dakota, on July 7, 1945. Shirley came out of the private Kellogg Zoo in California as a punk called Shirley Temple. She was later on the King Bros. Circus. Bunny and India were young elephants owned by Laura Anderson who had the concessions on the King show.

In 1946 and 1947 Gardner appeared with Polack Bros. Circus western unit. Here he worked Bunny and India again along with two veteran troupers Jenny and Lena from the old Powers performing elephants.

The December 1947 issue of *Coronet* contained a five page article about Gardner written by Jim Bishop. The first few paragraphs read: "After seeing Cheerful Gardner perform his daily tasks, most people ask in bewildered tones, 'Why in the world should anyone call him Cheerful.'

"Their queries are justified because for the past 19 years Cheerful has made his living by inserting his face into an elephant's mouth an average of twice a day.

The animal has then clamped his jaws around Cheerful's head, lifted him into the air and proceeded to carry him several hundred feet.

"As the pachyderm pads along, Cheerful is not merely to dangle vertically, but swings his body from side to side in a giant 180-degree arc.

"The daily procedure has won ovations from circus audiences all over the nation, and has also earned Cheerful two fine cauliflower ears."

From 1948 through 1950 Gardner took Bunny, India, Jenny and Lena to the Polack Bros. eastern unit. In 1949 the Polack show bought three baby elephants April, May and June. Cheerful was ailing then and was unable to do much training. In February 1950 he took this trio to Hugo, Oklahoma where they came under the fine training hand of Bill Woodcock. May be-

came Anna May, and in July 1951 was joined by two fresh imports, Fanny and Lydia. These of course became the Woodcock Performing Elephants. The remaining two became Norma and Hattie. Norma went to Clark and Walters Circus. She was killed by lightning at Quawka, Illinois on June 17, 1972 on that show. Hattie stayed with Kelly-Miller and then went to Carson and Barnes and is presently with the Circus Vargas herd.

Gardner spent his last year on the road in 1951 with Howard Y. Bary's British African Zoo Train.

Frank Gardner died in Los Angeles, California on March 17, 1952. He was buried in Venice, California on March 21, 1952 in his military suit, Sam Brown belt, and red ribbon cap with silver elephant emblem. Sawdust was sprinkled on his grave.

This great elephant man has been gone for some years now but he is not forgotten. When ever or where ever elephant men gather his name is still spoken of with reverence. Cheerful Gardner will always be remembered as the master of the elephants.

My thanks to William "Buckles" Woodcock, Jr., the late Bob Parkinson and Bill McCarthy of the Circus World Museum, and the Pfening Archives for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

The person who dreamed of, designed, built, and then operated Animaland U.S.A. spent his lifetime in outdoor show business. This article is neither a biography nor a career resume, but, rather an exposition of this unique traveling menagerie and, perhaps, an explanation of its success.

Edward Hebler, Eddie Billetti, Reds Billetti, they're all the same man. He began as a poler at the runs for Sells-Floto somewhere in the 1920s and found himself on Corporation shows as a prop man or a rigger a few years later. It was in this time period that he decided to frame, build, and then perform in his own high-wire act. And he made it all happen. However, the focus here is on Eddie's capability as a show builder.

Whatever the act was first called, the use of "Billetti" derives from the first name of a partner, Bill, and a phonetic, European-sounding spelling of his own first name, Eddie; hence "Billetti."

Like most show people, Eddie found himself in the armed forces during World War II. His tales of "midnight requisitions" or "cumshaw" acquisitions with which he and his Seabee associates in the Navy put together underground accommodations were amusing and amazing. But then Eddie was very good at recounting events from his wartime and show business experiences. From things that he said, one can assume that by the end of World War II Eddie had become a classic under-canvas type, a pusher, a straw boss, and a finger pointer.

In 1951 Ed Hebler was an assistant property boss on Ringling-Barnum. It would seem he took this position following his participation in the Don Robinson and Fay Bros. shows. [See "Short Sketches of Former Shows," by Joseph T. Bradbury, *Bandwagon*, May-June 1988.]

At some point in the early 1950s the Ringling people established Circus Supply and Hardware Co. as a separate subsidiary and named Edward Hebler as president. It was located just beyond Fruitville Road near the Atlantic Coast Line station in Sarasota. As a major sideline, they built and sold the first TV towers for home owners to use with their brand-new televisions in flat Florida.

The author's good friend, Mark Pratt, recently mentioned his association with the outfit and I asked him to put his recollections on paper. Here's what he said: "Charlie Smaltz, Billetti's foreman, and I were talking when he asked me to drop

Eddie Billetti's **ANIMALAND U. S. A.** **An Overview** **BY TONY CONWAY**

by the Circus Supply quonset at 4th Street and the Atlantic Coast Line railroad as Billetti needed some machine and drafting work done.

"The first big job was to design and build a small cage wagon originally requested by John Cuneo of the Cuneo Press family who had a private menagerie and circus farm outside Chicago at Libertyville. While we were working on this, Pat Anthony, the first person to take wild-animal training on the G.I. Bill, came in with a problem. He needed cage wagons that could be accessed to his tractor-trailer rig.

"I had made some preliminary drawings from Billetti's ideas and Pat added some ideas of his own. The wagons were finished in about three weeks. We in-

Two of the Billetti designed and built wild animal cages on Ringling-Barnum in 1957. Pfenig Archives.

stalled an electric winch, wire cable and atow hook next to the forward wall of the semi-trailer and rolled the wagons up and in. It worked perfectly! Cuneo came to the shop, liked the results, and contracted for several more.

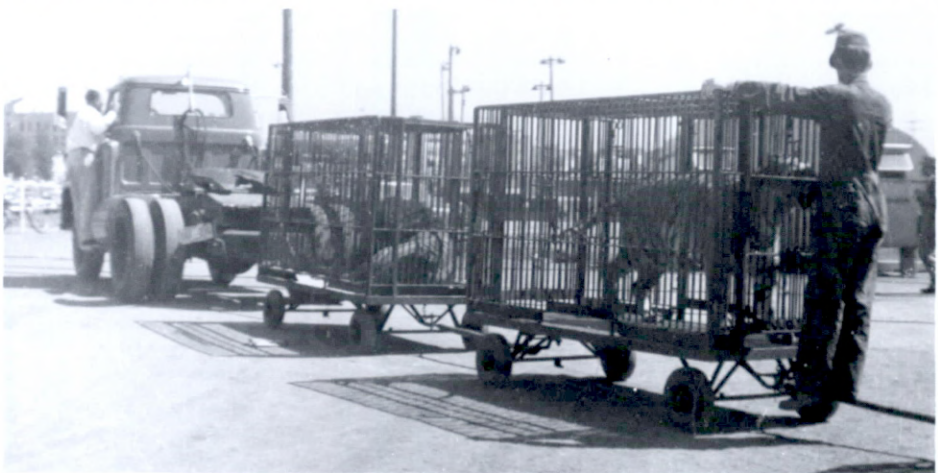
"As big top poles had always been a handling problem, labor intensive, etc., Billetti was asked to build some that were lighter, stronger, and easier to handle, assemble, and load. He came up with aluminum telescoping poles, counter bored seats at the top of each section, so that sections assembled like a fishing pole.

"We also made the first aluminum arena cage sections out of T-6 anodized aluminum almost as strong as steel and one third the weight.

"We fabricated a 'Flying Saucer' on a Cushman mail-cart-type vehicle. Rolled four inch aluminum channel into an eight-foot diameter ring, riveted aluminum sheets to a smaller ring at the top and the same thing at the bottom. After removing the wheels from the chassis of the cart, we built a tricycle landing gear driven by chain-and-sprocket from the original axle to two rear wheels on fixed landing gear. Built into the outside middle channel were 32 colored lights which lit consecutively, traveling clockwise, giving the appearance of a spinning top. Very effective! Then we test drove it down Fruitville Road at night and the police got several 'U. F. O.' calls.

"We also made several horses from Celastic and Fibreglass for Horne's Cars of Yesterday including two half-sized horses for Princess Elizabeth's [now Queen Elizabeth II] half-sized coach.

"Standard items fabricated by the shop daily and concurrently with the items I've



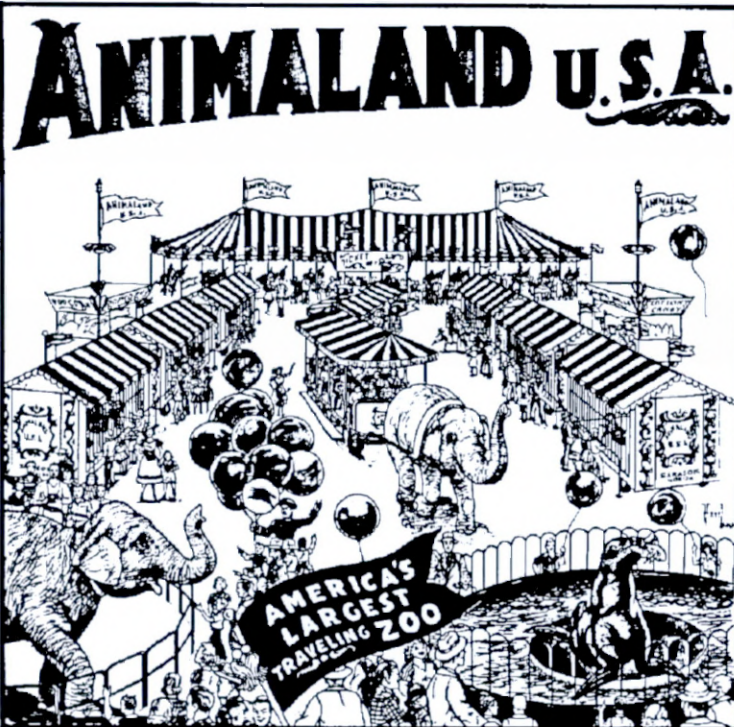
already mentioned included bale rings, floss machines, aerial riggings, slides for animal acts, circus floats, grease joints, bubble machines and bubble juice for Holiday On Ice, and just about anything else used in a spec or on a midway.

"I've worked with many engineers in industry and in the space program, but I rate Eddie Hebeler [Billetti] as having one of the best original minds of all. He would solicit opinions, but would come up with the correct and decisive answer. Eddie's best remark was: 'Let's try it.'"

When the company was disbanded, Eddie took all the records, the books, and the receipts in to Henry Ringling North. After checking over everything, Buddy expressed great surprise on determining it was the only Ringling subsidiary to return a profit.

When Art Concello, Lloyd Morgan, and others were framing the 1957 version of what I term "the ball-park Ringling," it was Eddie Billetti who designed and built the ring curbs, the cages for the cat-act animals, the flatbed semis for transporting the cages and the winch system for loading and unloading the semis, among others. But then he'd already done many of these things earlier.

Leaving the Ringling show Billetti began his efforts toward the traveling unit that would become Animaland U. S. A. The six cages were identical to those on Ringling (and very close to if not identical to those still on Ringling-Barnum units). Then Ed added metal walls at the ends of the cages, added skyboards for flash, and painted them with white enamel and artwork, recalling, as have other showmen, "The White Show," the self-styled "Circus



This drawing by Forrest D. Freeland was used on Billetti's advertising. Author's collection.

Beautiful" Sells-Floto. Finally, he constructed attractive awnings to set off each cage and, of then great and now greater importance, provided shade for the animals on hot, sunny days. His flats and his winching system were those he'd used on Ringling-Barnum and earlier.

The cotton-candy, popcorn, and ticket wagons were built on the same base as were the cages and included a unique method of providing room for the operators when on the lot. There was a double pony sweep under an attractive top

Eva and the elephant train ride on left in 1961. The ticket office is at right. Photo by Claire Conway.



whose canvas duplicated the red and white awnings on the cages. This touch was also used on the awnings of the two car elephant train he carried. Perhaps the greatest draw was the two elephants, one of whom always was pulling the highly attractive "elephant train" loaded with children and their parents.

All the cages and all the wagons based on the cage chassis loaded crossways on the two flatbed semis. A larger space was constructed off the back of each flatbed unit on which to carry one of the elephant-train cars. All wagons were winched onto and off the semis using one of the Chevrolet tractors that pulled them.

It's my understanding from talking with Eddie Billetti many times over a number of years that the entire concept for the unit was his alone. It was his decision to

have special art prepared by the well-known and talented Forrest Freeland. The best-known piece is an overall view of the layout depicting it just about as it was on the lot. In four colors, you see the younger elephant pulling the train with the bigger, older elephant in its corral at front left.

Eddie was very proud of his animals, all of which came from the Ringling show. I'm curious about the circumstances, but I don't have any information. While I can't name all of the cage animals, one was Sweetheart, the leopard, the personal pet of Martha and J. Y. (Doc) Henderson. The elephants were the celebrated Big Ruth, known to many showmen as Barnes Ruth, and Eva, one of the punks added to the Ringling herd in 1953. It was intended that the two bulls spell each other in pulling the train but Eva, young and full of energy, often was restless in the corral so Eddie decided to let her do train duty full time and give Big Ruth the semi-retirement she so deserved since she already was about 72 years of age.

Ed wanted a man for his agent who cared about the business, who was honest and trustworthy, who was willing to learn, and who would follow the instructions of his employer. His choice had been the first full-time curator at the Ringling Museum of the Circus and had been the driving force and first head at the Circus Hall of Fame. The Billetti choice was John L. Sullivan. From what I know, "Sully" learned where to go, who to see, how to depict Animaland to mall committees



The Animaland wild animal cages were attractively decorated and were displayed under a canopy. Claire Conway photo.

and much more on the job. Once, during one of the last tours of the unit, Eddie told me he thought Sully was getting suggestions on how to do his job from other agents and that was just what Eddie didn't want. He told me, and I'm sure he told Sully, that the way others did things wasn't the way Animaland did them. In this regard, it's quite possible that both Eddie and Sully learned together. They were a good team and worked well together.

The third permanent member of the Animaland team was Thais (pronounced They-is), Eddie's wife and partner. With the Hebler's two daughters under supervision of a close, reliable friend, Thais was on the unit, most often manning the ticket wagon while Eddie supervised the novelty stand. Thais also handled certain duties from Sarasota when not on the road. Since Eddie's death, she has resided in California where, the last we heard, she is a licensed physical therapy practitioner.

The Animaland U. S. A. began its first tour in Sarasota, Florida on January 8, 1959. The full route is not known, but it was in Baltimore, Maryland from August 10 to 15.

The second season opened on January 6, 1960 at the South Gate Mall in Sarasota. The attraction moved to Hialeah's Flamingo shopping center to open on January 11. It remained in the Maimi area until February 20, playing a total of nine shopping centers. It stayed four to seven days in each location. Animaland stayed in Florida until early April when it played Albany, Georgia. The

route then went through South and North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. It was in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania for three days from May 26 to 28. A number of dates were played in New Jersey before returning to Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. A long jump was made from Newport News, Virginia to open in Lancaster, Ohio on September 20. After four additional stands in Ohio, Animaland jumped from Cincinnati to Knoxville, Tennessee. The final stands of the season were in Chattanooga, Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama where it closed on November 5.

The 1961 season opened in Sarasota on January 5. The attraction played Florida dates until April 5 when it was in

Big Ruth the elephant in her retirement on Animaland in 1961. One of two closed stock semis is at right. Claire Conway photo.



Eddie Billetti seated next to the novelty stand in 1961. Claire Conway photo.

Wilmington, North Carolina. Moving north quickly it was in Woodbury, New Jersey May 8 to 13. Shopping centers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were played through September. Animaland then played a few dates in Maryland, Virginia and Florida and closed in Bradenton on November 18. The 1961 tour was longer in days, but nine less cities were played.

Several people attempted bringing out their own version of a traveling zoo. Ben Davenport, former owner of Dailey Bros. Circus, had an outfit consisting of a number of his heavy semis with a variety of animals, including a hippo I seem to recall, and all the other things you'd expected of him, including girls for the working men. No effort was made to clean out the cages or the area around them. At a Maryland suburb of Washington, D. C., the Davenport operation was on one corner of a broad intersection and Animaland was located catercorner on the other, so some of the Billetti people went over and sized up things, thus providing the above impression.

A much more attractive effort was that of Jack Joyce, the camel and horse trainer. Jack seemed to have nothing but problems, all kinds of things kept going wrong. Jack, as you might expect, had his camels with different circuses during this period and left managing his shopping center unit to others. Eddie thought this decision unwise in that even good managers don't have the interest to give attention to small details of an owner-manager.

A final example of a would be Animaland competitor had a fun-

ny side. The man attempting this came up to Eddie in the Washington, D. C. area and told him about the whole thing. He said he'd come around the unit a number of times in the previous several years and taken photographs--and, maybe, made some sketches--of the equipment so he could build an outfit of his own. Then he went ahead and built his own wagons and so on.

Having built his wagons, Eddie told me that same evening, the man tried loading them only to find that he didn't understand how Billetti constructed them and he always tore them up in getting them on and off the flatbed semis. Of course, this man wasn't a circus engineer like Eddie and he had no idea of what would work and what wouldn't on a traveling show.

"Circus engineers" never were numerous, never had college degrees that I know of, and didn't need detailed blueprints to work from. A sketch on an envelope or a stray piece of paper was normal practice. William H. "Cap" Curtis was a "circus engineer." Another was John "Happy Jack" Snellen, first with the Ringling Bros. show and then with Ringling-Barnum. Maybe Ringling-Barnum's Ed Yeske rates. For my part, personally, I've known a number of circus engineers as personal friends: Eddie Billetti, Gerald "Charlie" Smith of Ringling-Barnum, and Robert S. "Mac" MacDougall, the pre-eminent circus engineer of the last several decades.

There were no "names" on Animaland. One young man, George Kirby, joined on somewhere in Maryland and stayed several seasons learning to do most everything there was to do. He became something of a right hand man to Eddie. And Nick H, the only name he was known by, was responsible for the elephants for a while.

The year that Eddie tested the Jan M. Dorfay one-ring circus with Animaland, Eddie and "Whitey" Bowen, and cookhouse and grab-joint people, were brought on to handle the newly-built grab joint that was to offer hamburgers and hot dogs. But that's another story and we'll leave it for someone else to tell.

Animaland was well built, well painted, and well presented. The semis, two flatbeds and two closed-vans, were never visible to the general public. There always was a "night lot" where the semis were kept and to which all of the cages, the elephants, the ponies, and any lead stock were taken each night. There, very com-



The Animaland popcorn wagon was the same size as the floss, ticket and elephant ride wagons. Claire Conway photo.

fortable quarters for the working men were built in up over the fifth wheels of the two units that transported the ponies and elephants.

Visiting Animaland U. S. A. was free, the cage animals cost nothing to view. You could walk around Big Ruth and give her peanuts, popcorn, cotton candy endlessly. Between her tours with the train, you could approach and feed Eva, too. But she was young and alert and her trunk was quick so she often got the cotton candy or popcorn you intended for yourself. The looks on the faces of those show had been "stolen from" and the laughter of the onlookers was another freebie for those on the lot.

The price was right back then in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The first year everything cost just 15 cents. An elephant ride, a pony ride, popcorn, or cotton candy were all the same exact price, 15 cents. Furthermore, there were, at least most of the time, merchant coupons good for the elephant ride. The following year the prices were raised to 25 cents. I never checked the price of the novelties, but I do know Eddie would have priced items on the reasonable side.

Diaries I still have show that one time Claire and I took Doc and Lucy Mann, the retired director of the National Zoo and his wife, to a nearby date. My wife Claire and I visited at many spots and did little things to help out. On a number of occasions, This would have Claire help her in making the end of the day count of the day's take. It was a good living back then. One evening, Ed tied the unit's llama to the door of his car and had us drive the car over to the night lot with the animal loping along with us; think we managed a speed of five mph max. And we often vis-

ited the Hebelers' home in Sarasota, one season going out to Bobby Snowden's place where the Animaland equipment was stored where we watched the training of Eva.

Nice people all! Eddie, Thais, Sully, and just about anyone else who was with Animaland U. S. A. over the years were just honestly earning a living. They played shopping centers before closed malls took over. Others came--and left. What was the difference? I'd say pride in what they presented the public, quiet satisfaction and, yes, pleasure from the thank you's and other positive remarks from that same public. I'm so very glad I knew them all. I'm proud that the Hebelers, the Sullivans, and the Conways were such good friends.

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Tickets,
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Century, Early Teens,
Twenties & Thirties. . .

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The name of W. C. Coup, in 1888, first appeared in the Topeka press in a story carried by the *Kansas Democrat* on May 5.

"The following has been addressed to the papers throughout the country by W. C. Coup: 'A certain Associated press dispatch, describing the arrest of one Coup, of Coup Brothers' circus, at Vincennes, Indiana, is going the rounds of the press. As I am the only party of that name who ever owned or managed a circus in America, the item does me great injustice. There is not now, nor never was, such a firm as Coup Brothers' circus, and this fact being universally known all over the country, the article cannot but reflect upon me, personally. Trusting that you will give this prominent space and that my newspaper friends throughout the country will copy, I am the original and only circus manager of this name.'"

One of the finest illustrations ever used in any show ad appeared August 3, in the *Democrat*, and in the *Daily Commonwealth* heralding the coming of W. C. Coup's Troupe of Educated Horses on August 6 for a week-long engagement in Garfield Park. Shown in the advertisement were liberty horses, beautifully engraved, carrying books and slates en route to school, the Horse College.

In addition to the ad described above, Coup ran 57 short statements in the Topeka papers, such as:

"16 Beautiful Horses. Sixteen beautiful and educated horses will be at Garfield park next week. They go to school like children, jump ropes, do military drills, battle scenes, etc. They will give two performances daily--afternoon and evening."

On opening day the *Democrat* reported that, "W. C. Coup's trained horses marched single file through the streets behind a brass band in a wagon. They are as fine equinal specimens as have been placed on exhibition in this city at any time."

Another parade was held on August 11. "The mascot of Marshall's band, a colored youth about fourteen years old," according to the *Democrat*, "marched ahead of the boys this morning in the street parade given by Coup's celebrated trained horses, swinging a baton, which he did with the skill of an army drum major."

Marshall's band was a Topeka ag-

THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED UNICORN

Chapter 3 Part Two

Everything Entirely New, Rich, Original and Bewildering

By Orin Copple King

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gregation with a wide reputation for excellence, and 100 years later is still in existence. Coup carried no musicians.

Coup's press agent, Hugh Coyle, late of the *Kansas City Daily Sun*, did an excellent job in Topeka. Following opening night the *Democrat* carried a laudatory review.

"LEADING PLACE OF AMUSEMENT. Garfield Park and Its Summer Am-

William Cameron Coup. Circus World Museum collection.



phitheater Which Will Remain There.

"The horse show at Garfield park is the most wonderful performance that has been given in this city for a long while. It is under the management of W. C. Coup, the old-time showman. Any exhibition he gives his name to is, as a matter of course, meritorious. Sixteen horses take part in the performance. They are trained as it would seem impossible to train horses. As people said who saw them, 'they do everything but talk.' Their military drill is simply marvelous. Nothing else of the kind was ever witnessed. The pavilion in which the performance is given is most admirably arranged. It is shaped like an amphitheater. The roof is canvass. The seats are comfortable and furnished with

backs unlike the uncomfortable, regulation circus seat.

"It is cool and pleasant. For summer amusements, no place in the country has better facilities now than Topeka for putting on summer attractions. Already negotiations are pending for producing an opera and giving a kirmess there. Marshall's band furnishes the music, and withal, Garfield park now is the leading place of amusement in the city."

Coup's show remained in the park for a second week. The *Democrat* ran the following:

"W. C. COUP'S HORSES
To be at Garfield Park One Week
Longer—Reduction
in Admission Prices.

"We congratulate the management of Garfield park in securing for an additional week W. C. Coup's superb troupe of educated horses, as also in the reduction of the price of admission from 25 cents at the gate to 10 cents. Two performances each day will be given, in the afternoon commencing at 4 o'clock, in the evening commencing at 8:30. The conductors on the city cars, as will be seen by the advertisement, sell round-trip tickets including admission for 20 cents, children 15 cents. During the past week the park has been visited by the very best people in our community, and the success of the past week in this respect led the management to engage the troupe for the present week. No doubt the canvas will be filled at every per-

formance, as the weather promises to be delightful for park outings."

While Coup was in Topeka, the *Democrat* ran several lengthy stories, the following on August 13:

"A TALK WITH A SHOWMAN.

The Veteran Amusement

Manager,

W. C. Coup.

"When it comes to having had experience in the affairs of the world, W. C. Coup, the Nestor of American amusement managers, whose equestrianism attracted so many people to Garfield park last week and will draw many more this, should be awarded the blue ribbon.

"In 1871-72, the partner of Barnum; in 1874, manager of the New York aquarium, the most unique enterprise ever launched on the American continent; in 1880-81, sole proprietor of the largest show on earth; in the year of the Lord 1888, the head of an equine entertainment which, although modest in comparison with his previous ventures, is profitable and promising—is it not self-evident that the history of such a man must be entertaining?

"Barring gray hair and increasing portliness, it is the Coup of other and better days who may be found at the Union Pacific hotel this week. 'A little scarred and considerably battered,' he said to the *Democrat* representative yesterday, 'but still in the ring.' He then began a delightful talk, which was full of history.

"W. C. Coup entered the circus world through P. T. Barnum's introduction. In 1871 he became interested with Barnum in the great show, more through his hard labors and knowledge of Barnum's ways than capital. This connection lasted a year or more. Then Mr. Coup made an extensive European tour, during which his attention was attracted by the number of great aquaria there established. So impressed was he with the value of these institutions that he at once determined to secure the establishment of one in New York. This was the beginning of the great New York aquarium.

"His Great Aquarium.

"Mr. Coup's first proposition was to construct the aquarium in Central park, defraying all the expense, but claiming the privilege of retaining, from a given period, such profit as might be obtained for a small fee for admission; and when compensated for the outlay, to present the institution to the city as a gift. The park commission was not able to accept this proposition, owing to legal restraints. Then the great showman determined to undertake the work alone. The fine site at the corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth streets was selected, and upon it the erection of a suitable building was begun. Subsequently, Charles Reiche, the well

known importer of wild animals, became associated in the enterprise.

"The labor attending such a gigantic scheme was enough to appall an ordinary man. Although possessed of all the attainable data regarding the aquaria of Europe, Mr. Coup was constantly embarrassed by unforeseen obstacles which only repeated experiment and the lavish expenditure of money could remove. It was not until October 11, 1886, that the aquarium was opened to the public. The building occupied an area of over 20,000 square feet, the enclosing walls of which were lined with crystal cages containing the fish and other objects of interest. Since fish breathe common air, just as men and women do, the grand problem to be solved in the construction of the aquarium related to the methods by which a constant supply of oxygen should be maintained. In nature the tides, waves and currents, with rain and wind as allies, serve, aerate and change the water of sea, lake or river as often as it is needed. Kindred artificial

processes were necessary to replace their natural agent. It would require too much space to narrate how Mr. Coup and his experienced assistants worked out this gigantic problem. That they were successful, however, is a matter of history. The aquarium was a reality, a revelation of the secrets of the sea, and thousands enjoyed the marvelous tales it told. It is one thing to read of the great whale, the man-eating shark, the terrible devil-fish and the other monstrous creatures with which the deep sea abounds, and another to stand face to face with them, as it were, separated from their horrid forms only by a partition of glass. This unique experience was afforded New Yorkers, and that they appreciated it was manifested by the seemingly endless stream of dollars which poured into the treasury of the management.

"TERMINATED BY THE TOSS OF A PENNY.

"But everything has an ending, and the end of the New York aquarium practically came when Messrs. Coup and Reiche disagreed as to the advisability of opening the place on Sunday, the former deeming it suicidal to admit the public on the day the chief patrons of the place were so anxious to keep sacred. Finding that they could not agree and that Reiche was bent upon carrying out his ideas, Mr. Coup proposed that they toss up a penny

to decide which should carry on the business. Reiche consented and won and Coup stepped down and out. The aquarium was doomed from that moment and soon closed its doors.

"The next heard of the showman he and Dan Costello were running a money-making equine paradox. In 1880 Mr. Coup started a small railroad show on the road, and made more money. That winter he re-invested every dollar he had made with the smaller show in a larger one, and in 1881-2 his show was a monster affair, being larger, if anything, than any other circus and menagerie in the country. There was great consternation in show circles when Coup sailed in and gave battle. The fights of rival concerns were vigorous and oftentimes sensational in those days. There was no keeping compacts about each staying in certain territory. The plans of a show before the season opened were rigidly guarded. Coup

gained fame and money for a time, and was surrounded by veterans of the ring as his assistants. Suddenly, late in the season of '82, he failed in Detroit. In spite of his efforts to effect a release the combinations that realized he was better out of the field than in it helped hold him

down, and his show was sold at auction. The writer recalls the sensation caused in Buffalo, N. Y., by the passing through Main street of a large part of the rolling stock of the combined shows which the Buffalo *Courier* show printing house had taken to offset its bill for printing. Since the failure of this great venture Mr. Coup has given his attention to the equestrianism.

"He no longer has an ambition to manage monster shows. He is satisfied to give the people a chaste performance, like the equestrianism, which is a study as well as an entertainment."

One should remember that Coup was not always handicapped by the facts.

Another story, frequently at odds with the above, was published in the *Democrat* on August 17.

"SOMETHING ABOUT SHOWS.

Hard to Make a Legitimate Exhibition
a Paying Investment.

"Mr. W. Coup, the veteran showman, says that there is no money in 'tented' show business now-a-days on a large scale, except through means and through methods which he never did or would employ or allow to be employed in any enterprise he ever was engaged in. The illegitimate methods he speaks of consists



of the acts of confidence people, thimble rigging gentry, three-card-monte men, jewelry fakirs and a score or more of other thieves who form a part of the tented shows of the country and who pay the proprietor large bonuses, almost enough to pay the running expenses to be allowed to rob and fleece the people whenever they can and wherever they go. The hall or theatrical show business he is not familiar with. He has refused untold thousands in money from these sharks. And the failure of the great W. C. Coup's hippodrome at Detroit a few years ago was the result of a conspiracy on the part of these wolves. Since his big show is out of the race, and there is practically no competition salaries of performers have been reduced to one-half to what they were when he was in the shine. Before his failure at Detroit the Barnum show offered to buy his show and pay him \$50,000 more than it was worth, and also to give him \$25,000 per year for five years for the use of his name. Another erroneous impression has gone abroad that Mr. Barnum put Mr. Coup in show business. Mr. Coup is the oldest circus showman now alive in America, and all of the modern ideas and practical appliances in the tented business belong to him. In 1870 he originated what is now known as the Barnum show with his own money, and instead of Barnum putting him into the business he put Barnum on the tented field. He conducted the Barnum show for six years, retiring with a fortune and benefited his health. The only show Barnum had ever had over the road prior to this time was a concert show given by Jenny Lind. He is the first man that ever placed a show upon the railroads dropping the wagons and country roads and that was in 1871. It then took sixty cars, twenty more than now, to transport the Barnum hippodrome, and they were built by John Gill, of Columbus, Ohio. This move on Mr. Coup's part created a great stir and remodeled the entire system of circus show traveling. He originated the separate tent idea—menagerie tent, elephant tent, museum tent, circus and hippodrome tents. He also originated the cook and mess tents for the men, as also the horse stable tent, on which he held a patent for a long time. He has one in use for his horses now at Garfield park. He originated the great New York aquarium in New York city, which cost half a million dollars, and in a dispute with his partner, Mr. Richey, flipped a big copper cent with him as to who would remain and conduct the concern, he lost the flip



and Richey took it and not knowing how to conduct it properly it was a failure in a year afterwards. He has refused on several occasions of late years \$10,000 per year for the use of his name to the same kind of showmen spoken of in the preface to this article. He is not proud of any part of his circus experience, and the only part of his entire eminent career in which he takes pride is his New York aquarium, and to that end he is now bending every effort of his life.

"Mr. Coup's acquaintances, associates and friends are among the very best people in the nation, and the most prominent people in New York have been urging him for two or more years to re-establish his equestrian curriculum there. Mr.

Coup owns now, in addition to his educated horse show at Garfield park, an elephant show, now traveling in Australia, one-half interest in a traveling museum and menagerie in England, and one-half interest in the James Robinson circus and menagerie, and the Elliot London shows, now traveling in Illinois and Indiana. Mr. Coup was the originator of the advance advertising cars and was the first man to employ a press agent to travel with a show, and Dave Thomas, book and job printer, now at New Haven, Conn., was the man."

Another outstanding engraving showing a "thrilling Battle Scene" appeared in the *Journal*.

The *Journal* on the 15th quoted Coup as saying there "was no money in the show business in this country. The only man who ever made any money in the show business in America is Barnum. All the rest have failed sooner or later, or barely managed to make both ends meet."

The best description of Coup's entertainment appeared in the *Topeka Daily Capital* on August 16

"KNOWING HORSES.

A Troupe of Educated Animals
Entertaining the Multitudes.

"For more than a week every afternoon and evening Coup's band of fourteen educated horses and a little donkey, Peck, have been entertaining the people at Garfield park. The scene opens by Marshall's band playing an overture. The horses appear and bow gracefully while the music is in progress. A school scene is then enacted, all the horses carrying satchels of books and the little pony Nick and Peck each with lunch baskets. This scene is very pleasing to school children. At recess

Nip and Tuck have a delightful game of see-saw.

"Another pleasing feature is the educated horse which seems to understand everything that is said. Three colored handkerchiefs are placed in a box and whatever color is called for is picked up.

"Peck's Bad Boy, the donkey, enjoys a swing. Peck is placed on rockers like a hobby and rocks as though one solid block of wood.

"The battalion drill is especially fine, the horses march and countermarch with, seemingly, as much intelligence as displayed by humans.

"The band plays a lively waltz and a fine blooded horse goes through all the dainty, graceful curves in perfect time with the music.

"The war scene is especially thrilling. Small cannons are fastened on the backs of the horses. They are divided into two sections, one entrenched behind breastworks. The cannon is loaded and a string attached to the trigger hanging where the horse can pull it. At a given signal the cannons are fired, part of the horses downing as though really shot.

"The knowledge displayed is really wonderful. During the rest of this week, afternoon and evening, these exhibitions will be given and you can not afford to miss seeing them one or more times."

From Topeka Coup moved on to Atchison.

Several vicious and boasting statements were made by Coup while in Topeka. A challenge by an uncredited opponent appeared September 14, in the *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*.

"A SQUARE DENIAL.

Critical Coup Casually Criticized
by a Circus Commissioner.

"The attention of a prominent circus agent having been called to the remarks of W. C. Coup, the showman, published in the *Democrat* of the 17th ult., he said, "It is a great mistake for a man in Mr. Coup's situation to thus misrepresent and antagonize his contemporaries. To paraphrase the words of Festus to Paul, too much misfortune hath made Coup mad, and he cannot reply that he speaks the words of soberness and truth. While I freely award to Mr. Coup the credit of having run a clean show, that certainly does not justify him in making the libellous and absolutely false assertion 'that there is no money in the tented show business nowadays on a large scale, except through methods which he never did or would employ, or allow to be employed. . . . Confidence people, thimble rigging gentry, three-card-monte men, jewelry fakirs and a thousand or more other thieves, who form a part of the tented shows of the country, and who pay the

proprietor large bonuses, almost enough to pay the running expenses, to be allowed the privilege and protection of the proprietors to rob and fleece the people whenever they can, and wherever they go.' Such accusing and intemperate language as this is made directly applicable to the Barnum and London show, and by the stabs of inference Mr. Coup charges P. T. Barnum, his former partner, with being the intimate partner and associate of thieves, and blacklegs, and places Mr. James A. Bailey in the same rogue's gallery. Doing tented business on the largest scale, the conclusion is inevitable that Mr. Coup's charge was intended to apply first, and on the largest scale, to them. Without stopping to consider what Mr. Coup's object can possibly be in thus vilifying by wholesale, I wish simply to remark that he knows the Barnum and London show to be absolutely free from the associations and surroundings of which he speaks. He knows that both Mr. Barnum and Bailey abhor and stamp out camp followers of all kinds, that they rent no privileges, countenance no rascality, and employ a special force of detectives that even the pickpockets and petty thieves generally attracted by large crowds, give the Barnum show a wide berth. If one is found in any place where it exhibits, he is spotted and run in on general principles, before he has a chance to ply his light fingers. This is even better than Mr. Coup ever did in his palmist days of virtue and success. It is simply preposterous to assert that men worth millions officiate as pals and fences for thieves and gamblers. Surely Mr. Barnum requires no defense against such charges, and as for Mr. Bailey, Mr. Coup also knows that he never played a game of cards, drank a drop of liquor, or made a wager, and I happen further to know that he will not even permit his performers and employes to play cards simply for amusement, as he says it might be made a cover for gambling, in which some sharper would fleece the unwary of their wages.

"While it is not a matter of much importance, Mr. Coup's claims are largely as baseless as his accusations. He did not put Mr. Barnum in the tented business. Mr. Barnum was interested in that business nearly twenty years before he took up Mr. Coup. He is not the first man that ever placed a show upon the railroads. That was one by Dr. Spaulding as far back as 1860. He did not originate the separate tent idea. The credit of that, I



The Little Red Riding Hood pony float appeared in the 1888 Barnum parade. Al Conover collection.

believe, belongs to Joel E. Warner. He did not originate the horse stable tent. James E. Cooper did that in 1867. He did not originate the advance advertising car. But, unfortunately, what Mr. Coup did do was to get it into his head that he was a bigger man than Barnum made him. Spurred on by this foolish and fatal notion, he undertook to fight the great showman. It was a battle of a poodle against a Jumbo. It ruined Coup, and merely advertised Barnum. Since then Mr. Coup seems to have lost his business balance and mental equipoise, and it is charitable to presume that he either does not mean what he says, or does not say what he means. He is a kind-hearted, social gentleman, once possessed of great executive vigor and originality of ideas, but always hampered by feeling above the business in which he was engaged, and unwise enough to largely discount

The Bluebeard pony float appeared in the children's section of the 1888 Barnum parade. Princeton University Library collection.



himself by continually harping upon the subject. "The worst feature of his idle and egotistical gabble is that it gratuitously and causelessly tends to injure and defame those engaged in a business, already unjustly, and even cruelly, misjudged, misapprehended and ignorantly abused."

"Remember to buy your circus tickets of E. L. Miller, also soda water and cigars.

"Barnum made a great hit when he secured E. L. Miller as ticket agent of this city."

In Marysville, Kansas, Miller's Drug Store was the place "where reserved numbered tickets can be bought at the regular price, and admission tickets at the usual slight advance on the morning of the show."

Considering the large throng that inundated Marysville on Circus Day, there can be little doubt that Barnum made a great hit, especially with E. L. Miller, when the ticket office opened in Miller's drug store.

The *Marshall County News*, Marysville, ran the first newspaper ad on August 24, announcing:

"BARNUM-BAILEY,
15 NEW UNITED SHOWS,
Marysville
Saturday, Sept. 8
P. T. BARNUM'S
Greatest Show On Earth,
Forever United to
Great London 3-Ring Circus
Paris Olympia Hippodrome,
Wild Moorish Caravan,
Horse Fair and
Grand Monster World's Exposition."

The ad identified P. T. Barnum and J. A. Bailey as equal owners. "15 Complete, Enormous, Combined Expositions 15" represented a capital of \$3,000,000 with daily expenses of \$6,800. The parade alone, according to a handout, exhibited without charge "\$1,500,000 worth or rare features."

"The tents are immense and seat 20,000 people, and it requires 64 railroad cars to transport the monster shows."

The press department made no effort to conceal the vastness of the enterprise.

The ad continued:

"Another such Grand and Magnificent Show Impossible of Organization. Myriads of deeply interesting and phenomenal features, all new and collected at fabulous expense.

"HORSE FAIR. Actually 380 horses on exhibition. 100 Intensely startling Acts

and breath-taking feats. 800 Phenomenal and fearless Performers. 100 Foreign Specialists and Daring Artists. 1,000

"New Features and Wonderful Attractions. Positively a Dozen Acts going on at once."

Hypkens were in great demand on the *Marshall County News*.

Admission to the entire 15 shows was only 50 cents. Children under 9 years, 25 cents.

"Everything entirely New, Rich, Original and Bewildering"—especially Bewildering—was the boast of the newspaper ads.

"Over \$600,000 in cash was expended last winter in accumulating new features to add to the glories of the greatest show on earth, and it is safe to say that twice as much would be spent were it necessary to maintain the supremacy that has always existed in the Barnum and London New United Fifteen Shows, with its three rings, circular elevated stage, double menageries, horse fair, artificial lake of real water, aquarium, aviary, aquatic sports, athletic games, museum of living human wonders, world exposition, Paris Olympia Hippodrome, new allegorical chariots, full military bands, juvenile fife and drum corps, new street parade, Japanese troupe, trained animals, seven open dens of wild beasts, trained zebras, trotting steers, thrilling races; and real Wild Moorish Caravan, tribe of wandering Bedouins, dancing girls, slaves, attendants, tents of animal skins, religious articles carried on the pilgrimages of the Moors to Mahomet's tomb at Mecca, and the Arabian horses, arms, weapons, priests, and other eastern and barbaric paraphernalia, illustrating in a grand, magnificent Moorish Entertainment the lives of these remarkable people on the great desert of Sahara, in camp, mimic battle, attacking caravans, and feats of wild eastern horsemanship and dexterity in the use of their curious weapons."

A special feature of the street parade which undoubtedly thrilled the 68 pupils of the primary department of the Marysville schools was a Children's Section displaying carved floats depicting Little Red Riding Hood, Sinbad the Sailor, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Mother Goose, Santa Claus and the Old Woman in the Shoe.

A mystery never explained in the Kansas press was the act of Capt. Paul Boynton in an "Artificial Lake of real water." During his presentation the Captain used a "water bicycle." Beyond the preceding no details were given. When the show was over how did they dispose of the "real water" and how much "real water" did the lake contain?

The show came to Marysville from Hastings, Nebraska.

In a fit of superiority the editor of the *News*, after the show had come and gone, printed the following:

"THE SHOW.

"The Spaniard loves the bull-fight and the typical American the show. One is in reality no better than the other. We do not propose in this brief space to open a discussion, read a homily or pose as the humanitarian, but there may be something in this to paint a moral or adorn a tale. As early as three o'clock Saturday morning teams and wagons were passing through town bound for the show. By five o'clock it was almost a procession. The old, the young, the strong, the weak; the man with half a dozen mortgages on his farm, the traditional renter who sold his cook stove, any and everybody were heading towards Marysville as the mecca of all earthly hopes. Then, there was the man with a large gad trying to make a lame horse keep up notwithstanding the rope harness was chafing him and he was pulling a wagon that had not seen grease for six months. There was no feed in that wagon, and the half starved creature who would pull it twenty miles and then stand for six hours in the hot sun had better be

assisting with all his might the little process of taking \$20,000 out of the county. Verily there may be something in the lines of Virgil as they read 'nox atra cava circumvolat umbra.'"

The *Marshall County Democrat*, Marysville, was more informative.

"Barnum's circus gave two exhibitions in this city last Saturday, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. In the afternoon their large tent was crowded to its utmost capacity. On account of an accident, which happened near Hanover, they were late in getting here, which necessarily delayed their street parade until about 12 o'clock instead of 9 o'clock as advertised. The parade was good as was also the performance. The largest crowd ever seen in Marysville was here on that day, the crowd being estimated at about 16,000 people. (Population, 1932) Broadway was one mass of people from one end to the other. The Barnum Company has been known to be composed of a much better class of people than is generally found with circuses. No gambling concerns of any kind was to be seen."

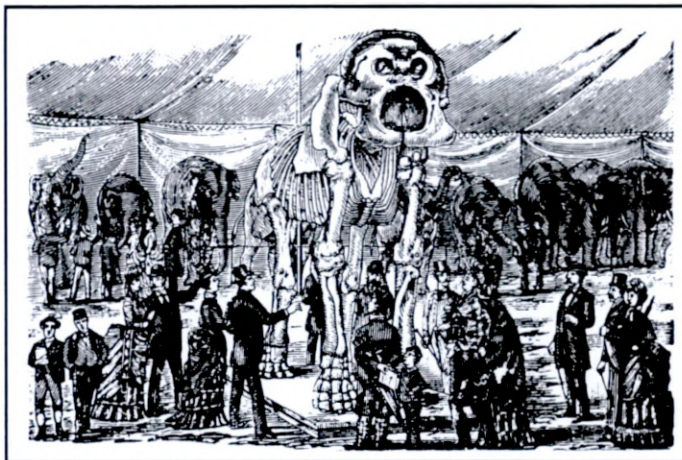
How important was Circus Day in Marysville? The *Democrat* answered with a report on September 6, that the democratic primary will be held to-morrow (Friday) in place of Saturday, Barnum's circus being here on that day."

It was payday when the show exhibited at Leavenworth on September 12. The *Evening Standard*, on the 13th, reported, "Yesterday was pay day at Barnum & Bailey's circus and after the afternoon performance stacks of silver were piled up in profusion in the actors' dressing rooms. Several of the employees who were paid left the show and remained to-day in the city."

In cool, cloudy weather "thousands of people," according to the *Standard*,

thronged the streets in the line of the parade and witnessed the gorgeous display.

"The boy drum corps, a feature in itself, lead the procession and from their tiny forms gradually grew the spectacle in beauty and grandeur until one was almost lost in the maze of elegant realities and beautiful symbols that appeared in panoramic review. After the procession had passed there was left a tout ensemble of brilliant caravans, nodding elephants, jogging Shetlands, grim mounted Moorish warriors, helmetted and mailed representatives of the Roman Empire, chariots drawn by blooded horses, bands of exquisite music, the colors of the various lands, fair ladies and athletes of the arena, echoes of an admiring crowd, Paul Boynton



Jumbo's skeleton was illustrated in the 1888 Barnum courier. Pfening Archives.

dead. It is bad enough to torture a bull for a couple of hours and then end it with death, but to starve a noble, kind beast like a horse for twenty years, force him travel on three legs when his crippled feet drag on the ground, is the refinement of cruelty and a strange parody on the spirit of the 19th century that contrives to educate its people by patronizing such entertainments at any and every cost. On the front seat at that show can be seen the very intelligent farmer who can lecture by the hour and explain to you the blighting effects of trusts, combines, protective tariff or free trade as the case may be, but is

ton and the prestige of P. T. Barnum that could not have been created by any other means."

The same newspaper advertisement, with variations in the cuts, appeared in every town and never failed to mention a peculiar attraction.

"JUMBO as natural and as big as life SRELETON."

Another incredible feature was "Talking and Acting Arctic Seals."

The exhibitions at Abilene on September 15 and Hutchinson on September 17 received scant recognition from the local papers. The Abilene *Chronicle* reported, "The town was crowded last Saturday with people who came to see the circus," and the Hutchinson *Democrat* claimed that, "Thousands of people from all the surrounding country were in town to see the biggest show on earth." The presence of the monster show was acknowledged and that was all.

The Winfield *Courier* was much more responsive concerning the exhibitions of September 18. Following Circus Day the *Courier* commented that, "The crowd in the show tent Tuesday was stated to be fully 12,000. The press agent said it would run over rather than under this number. This was the biggest crowd ever drawn here by a circus—in fact about as large as ever congregated here."

In another column of the *Courier* a press agent described the parade.

"BARNUM & BAILEY'S

The Greatest Show on Earth
Presents an Immense Parade.

"The circus day has come, the happiest of the year to a great majority of the amusement loving public. The tents of the Barnum & Bailey show have been pitched. They cover block upon block of ground and are scattered over all the vacant spots of the Loomis addition and other parts of the city. Immense is the outfit, nothing so large ever having encamped here before.

"The announcement that the street parade would be given this morning at 11 o'clock served to bring thousands of persons from other cities and towns, even drawing the recluse from his den and as early as eight o'clock the streets were almost impassible.

"The parade itself was all that a first-class show could publicly exhibit, consisting, as it did, of four or five bands, beautiful horses by the hundred, wagons mounted with ornamental gold and drawn by ponies, elephants, beautiful steeds and camels.

"One of the most interesting features of the pageant were the open cages, in

which wild animals roamed to and fro with savage looks at the interested spectators who ventured into the street and near the beasts' cages. In each of these wagons, with arms folded, sat a trainer with all that the term implies. Robed in gaudy garments, he sat upon his stool in the center of the cage, his arms folded, eyes steadily fixed upon the beasts, who growled as they brushed his limbs, incased in flesh colored tights.

"These cages were about ten in number. The king of beasts, or rather the kings, for three huge lions honored the first cage, at-



The Santa Claus pony float in the Bridgeport winter quarters. Princeton University Library collection.

tracted, perhaps, the most attention from the spectators, and the little man with eagle eyes who sat within the iron bars was the recipient of much admiration. This was not alone showered upon him, for following came cages, in which were hyenas, tigers, leopards, bears, panthers, trained wolves and various others of the savage beasts.

"The children's portion of the parade proved a delightful surprise. Midget ponies, Lilliputian horses, trained zebras, Clama and Albino mules were harnessed to golden chariots that illustrated in tableaux, the famous characters of the nursery tales—Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Santa Claus, Mother Goose, Sinbad the Sailor, Robinson Crusoe and Blue Beard were all to be seen. White camels and dromedaries were motive power that drew a dragon upon which was seated an entire Japanese family.

"The Oriental display included a pair of the Great Moorish Caravans, Arabs, Algerians and Bedouins. They were attired in their native Arab dress. It was a decidedly picturesque exhibition and a marked novelty.

"Such a multitude of beautiful horses has never been shown here before by any circus organization."

There was a bizarre happening during the parade that provided a paragraph for the *Courier*.

"A horse tied to a wagon got rattled at the big elephants in the parade yesterday and jumped in to the wagon box. After standing there for a short time he got out again without doing any damage."

Circus Day in Wichita, September 19, was one of gargantuan proportions. The *Daily Eagle* September 20, reported:

"The circus and menagerie were by far the best even he [Barnum] has ever shown. To attempt to dilate upon the innumerable attractions would be but to fill column after column. Everybody was delighted. The management of the aggregation was also as well pleased as was Wichita, for as Col. Bailey said to an *Eagle* representative, 'We have done the largest business by far in Wichita that we have done in the state of Kansas. It is far better than we expected.' The day crowd filled every available seat and was estimated at 18,000. There were 15,000 at night."

No matter how one might discount the estimated attendance of 33,000, the total would still be awesome.

"Yesterday, Wichita saw the greatest show or combination of shows she ever saw," according to the *Eagle*. "Barnum & Bailey's great fifteen allied shows, entire and complete, under one management gave their day and evening exhibitions to the two largest audiences ever gathered under a canvas in the state of Kansas. The crowds on the streets were simply immense when the grand street parade took place. As early as the night before the circus arrived, crowds began pouring in from all parts of the state within a radius of from forty to fifty miles. The early morning trains yesterday brought in crowded cars and extra cars on each line, until the principal streets presented a lively scene of moving, surging humanity. Every available window along Douglas avenue and North Main street was crowded before nine o'clock, the time announced for the great street pageant. They were well repaid for the trouble experienced in obtaining good views of the procession. As everything announced on the bill boards was absolutely and truly represented in the parade, Barnum's name for only claiming to advertise what he really shows was sustained to the letter here yesterday. Not only was there an immense variety of new, original and attractive features, but they were all represented upon an elaborate scale. Barnum is a showman who believes 'that one swal-

low doesn't make a summer, "but when he thinks one of a certain line would be an attraction, buys enough of the same sort to dazzle by its completeness."

The *Beacon*, an afternoon paper, carried the following report:

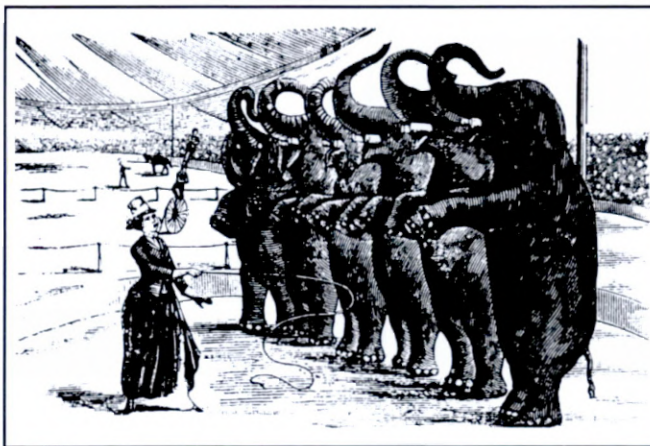
"The parade in itself was the largest and finest ever seen in the city. The procession was headed by a drum corps and besides this, there were three brass bands and two steam calliopes. The famous Boynton was represented as well as several other of the leading features presented by the great Barnum. Mother Goose and some of her pets were in the parade, including the old woman who lived in a shoe, while Cinderella, Blue Beard, Sinbad, the sailor, and numerous other classical and mythological figures helped to swell the parade and delight the immense crowds that crowded the streets all along the line. The number of fine horses was a great feature and notably the white ones. These seemed to predominate, and they were beauties. Sixteen elephants, about thirty camels and dromedaries were in the line, and all were gorgeously trapped and bespangled with glittering banners. The carriages were very massive affairs and the riders were representative of everything from Liberty to Cleopatra and her retinue. Fair equestriennes and brave equestrians filled in the apertures between the carriages and cages of wild animals, while bringing up the rear were the tribes of Arabs and Moors used in the show. A team of zebras looked very pretty, and of course the inevitable clown and his donkey were inseparable."

This drawing of Capt. Paul Boynton in his 1888 wetsuit appeared in the *New York Clipper*. Pfening Archives.

Police Chief McNamara was amazed by a day that required less police activity than the average non-show day in Wichita. Part of the success might be due to the fact that the police were ordered to close the "joints" on account of the circus. The *Beacon* remarked that, "Several were shut up but the most of them did not heed the order." Only two drunks were arrested, which set a record of sorts for prohibition Kansas.

Scott Jones had his pocket picked during the parade and lost about \$10.

A small ad in the



A lady elephant trainer appeared in the 1888 Barnum & Bailey courier. Pfening Archives.

Beacon claimed that, "The shrewd and experienced purveyor of the crew of operatives and performers of Barnum's 'Greatest Show on Earth,' after canvassing the city for the best place to buy groceries, decided that the store of Jno. A. Jewett & Co., 222 East Douglas avenue, was the place, and accordingly bought the groceries for his immense crew there, because, as he said, prices there were lower than elsewhere, and all goods first-class."

The Barnum-Bailey tour of Kansas in 1888 was triumph after triumph. The exhibitions on September 20 at Emporia were no different.

Many newspapers reported at length the arrival of a circus, but the *Emporia Democrat* on September 26 reported the departure of Barnum & Bailey, an exceedingly rare story.

"Barnum's left town Thursday night about 11:30 o'clock. The work of taking down and packing the huge tents, would seem to one unaccustomed to such work a long and arduous task; but to the experienced hands, it was but the work of a few moments. Before the evening performances were nearly completed, over half the great wagons and cages were loaded and ready to move, and in a short

time after the close of the entertainment, all three of the long trains were on their way to Ottawa, where they gave an exhibition Friday. This show is undoubtedly the largest which has ever visited our city, and should they pass this way again they will be heartily received."

The most interesting date of the Kansas tour and one which contains a message for all who search the past, was Friday, September 14. The first portent of the coming appeared in a handout in the *Kansas Democrat*, June 18, under a headline that read "The New Wonderland Giant."

"It is no wonder that P. T. Barnum and his big shows is continuously and increasingly popular. The invincibly great old manager embodies more conspicuously than probably any other man those pre-eminently American qualities of pluck and push, of which we, as a nation, are most proud. Within a few weeks after the almost total destruction of his great show by fire, he and his partner, Mr. J. A. Bailey, had the material well in hand for the present Great Traveling World's fair of Wonders which will visit Topeka on Friday, September 14, and it is a vast new combination of fifteen distinct exhibitive departments, far exceeding the really stupendous and unequaled show from whose ashes it has, Phoenix-like, so marvelously risen. Rare, exclusive and genuinely remarkable features are its special characteristic. Added to the attractions of its grand menageries, museums and circuses are hosts of sensations which it alone exhibits; such as the new Paris-Olympia Hippodrome, with its novel and thrilling wild beast and other races; the caravan tribe of wild Moorish and Bedouin warriors and equestrians; the quadrille dancing elephants; the amazing royal Japanese performers; Capt. Paul Boynton's unique performance in an artificial lake; a magnificent World's Horse fair; educated seals and zebras; many dens of performing savage beasts; Jumbo as natural as life, and his prodigious skeleton; all preceded by a free street parade which would alone attract tens of thousands of delighted spectators. It has been termed 'The Giant of Wonderland,' and such it really is."

On July 6, the *North Topeka Mail* reported, "The advance car belonging to Barnum & Bailey's circus arrived in the city last Sunday [July 1] and on Monday the posters [sic] connected with it began



to bill the town for their 'greatest show on earth' which will be in Topeka, Friday, Sept. 14."

Charles Stowe, press agent, was in Topeka on June 18, and did an outstanding job of placing handouts in all Topeka papers.

On August 24, the *Democrat* noted that, "Barnum's advance brigade, consisting of sixteen in number, are registered at the Adams."

Stowe, sometimes spelled Stow, returned to Topeka to launch the newspaper advertising which broke on September 7 in every Topeka paper. One of his first accomplishments was reported in the *Topeka State Journal*, September 7. "Mr. Chas. Stowe, general press agent of the great Barnum and London show, is in the city. He has made a contract to transfer the shows from the Union Pacific to the Santa Fe depot, at a cost of \$216. Barnum is too big to be moved for nothing. The agent too did not consider the Kansas avenue bridge large enough or sufficiently safe to use."

Almost immediately, Stowe's efforts hit a snag. It is hard to believe, but Stowe claimed he could not find an area within the city limits large enough to accommodate Barnum & Bailey. The site selected was outside the city by the width of a street and was served by two street car lines. The location was further enhanced by saving the \$300 city license fee.

The mayor and the city council were determined not to lose the \$300, and at a meeting in the evening of September 7, acted upon the matter.

"Mr. Coffin (a council member) thought that the proper thing to do," according to the *Democrat*, "was to draw up an ordinance requiring the payment of \$300 for any circus organization to parade the streets of Topeka."

"Finally the city attorney was authorized to draw up an ordinance requiring the payment of this sum, and present it at the next meeting of the council."

"Mr. Umry (a council member) was in favor of having the ordinance cover all parades of minstrel troupes or other theatrical companies."

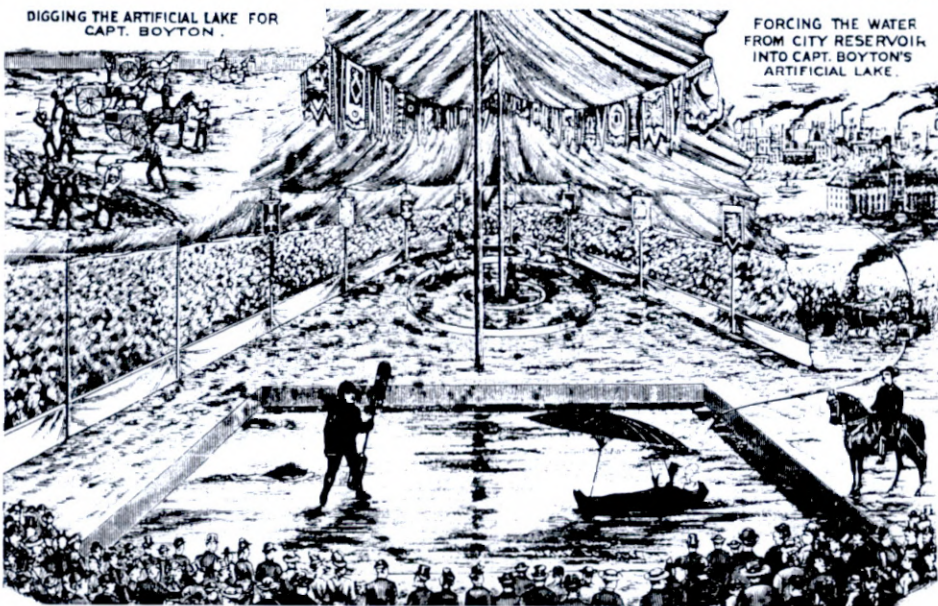
"The council then adjourned, some of the members imagining a brave act had been done."

Negotiations between the mayor and Stowe continued for several days. Stowe flatly refused to pay \$300 for the privilege of parading in the city. The mayor and the council between them decided that the mayor should hold out for \$300 for as long as there was any chance to receive it, but the mayor was instructed not to go lower than \$100. The *Democrat* of September 12 called it "Blackmailing," and reported that "Stow was seen and the attempt to levy blackmail on him was

successful, Stow agreeing that he would give \$125 if permitted to give a street parade, and the mayor promising that the blank left in the ordinance on this subject which the city attorney had drawn should be filled by inserting \$125, and that the ordinance would be passed Tuesday night so as to give the proceedings the appearance of being regular and lawful. Accordingly the ordinance was presented and passed last night, but the license was fixed at \$150. The council chuckled when they thought how Barnum and been bulldozed. They spoke of him as common and legitimate prey, but regretted they had not 'pulled his leg,' as some of the law-makers termed it, for a bigger sum.

"Now, Stow had promised to pay \$125 because he thought it his cheapest way out of a dilemma, and because he did not want to make an exception to Mr. Barnum's rule to give a street parade daily, rain or shine, and because he knew the little ones would look forward to it. Since then influential, respectable citizens have said to him that they do not approve the council's scheme of extortion, if not downright cheating, and they would prefer to have Mr. Barnum not give the parade, as the payment of the \$125 would be wrong and would be the result of not only unbusiness-like but fraudulent practices. Consequently, Mr. Stow wired his employers and outlined to them the situation here. It is altogether likely that the parade will not be given inside the city limits, but will be given just beyond the walls, starting from the terminus of the City Street Railway on the south side and proceeding to the city of Potwin Place returning by some other route."

This illustration of the artificial lake in the Barnum big top appeared in the show's 1888 courier. Pfening Archives.



"The ordinance as amended reads as follows:

"SECTION 1. That no person or persons, company or corporation shall give or cause to be given any circus or menagerie parade on, along or upon any streets of the city of Topeka without first having obtained a license therefor, and the charges therefor shall be \$150 per day."

"Any collection of persons, wagons, horses or animals, or vehicles of any kind, moving together through any street or streets to attract the public attention, shall be considered a parade within the meaning and intent of this ordinance."

"All licenses issued under this ordinance shall be issued in the manner provided by section thirteen of ordinance No. 767. Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this ordinance shall upon conviction be fined not less than \$100 nor more than \$300 for each offense."

"The ordinance as amended was passed and ordered published."

"It will require, therefore, that any circus and menagerie desiring to show here and to give a parade must pay \$300 and \$150-\$450. It is the intention of the council to so amend the ordinance as to make \$300 cover the right to parade and exhibit inside of the limits, or \$150 for parade when not located inside of the city limits."

A compromise was reported in the *Journal* on Circus Day. "The Mayor and the Circus."

"His honor has again brought upon himself the laughter of the community in connection with the little circus within a circus in regard to the demand for money, and also complimentary tickets. Yesterday it was practically agreed by the Barnum people to pay the city \$200 for showing and parading; but when the mayor added to the \$200 'compli-

mentaries' for the councilmen that was too much and the circus people 'kicked' and the matter went over. The show folks finally decided they would exhibit without the city, and agreed to pay \$125 for the parade, which they did this morning. It looks as though the mayor's request for complimentary cost the city \$75 aside from the unpleasant situation in which it placed his honor. The councilmen indignantly deny that the mayor had any authority in asking for 'comps' for them. The whole procedure in reference to the circus license has been comical to say the least. It was a small thing for the city to go to work and legislate specially to 'catch' Barnum's circus. It was, too, quite generally understood that the legislation in question was illegal, but that the circus folks could probably not afford to lose time to test it and would pay rather than fight. The council should now go to work and adopt some reasonable and fair ordinance that will be legal and comprehensive, that will not prohibit a parade, and yet turn about \$100 into the treasury. Circuses have some rights, but they should pay something to the city as their presence generally entails additional police expense, etc. If the whole business was a joke, it was a labored one."

On Circus Day, the Topeka *Daily Capital*, a morning paper, emphatically stated that "no Barnum parade will be made within the city limits, but will be given instead around the big meadow just north of the fairgrounds."

The *Daily Commonwealth*, another morning paper, stated that, "The Barnum parade will positively not be given to-day in Topeka."

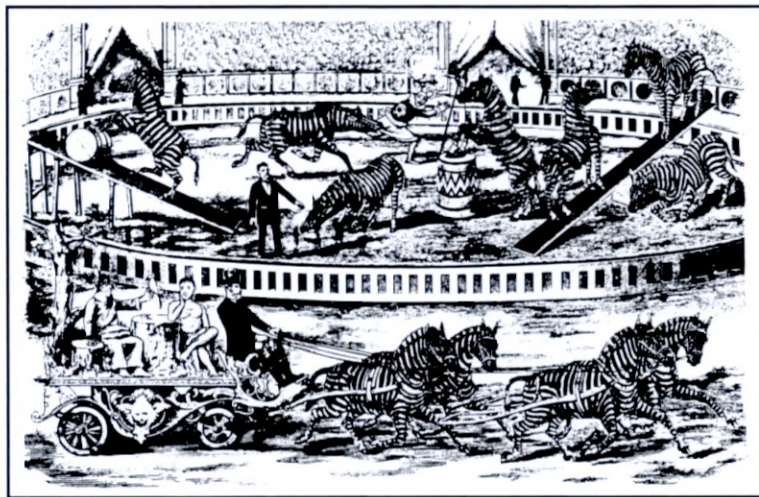
The *Journal* and the *Democrat*, both afternoon papers, reported Barnum & Bailey's parade on Kansas Avenue, Topeka's main street. The following day the *Commonwealth* also reported the parade on Kansas avenue. The *Capital* made no mention of the parade.

Here is a lesson for all researchers. The Shawnee County Historical Society in its thirtieth publication, issued July, 1958, reported that the Barnum & Bailey show did not parade on the city streets. If the researcher, Lois Johnson Cone, had carried her search a few hours longer, she would have learned that Barnum & Bailey did, indeed, parade on the city streets. All good history begins before and continues on past the event. Assume nothing.

The parade was witnessed by thousands but did not pass without incident, as reported by the *Democrat*.

"SCARED AT THE PARADE.

"While the circus parade was passing the DEMOCRAT office, a horse at the corner of Seventh street became frightened, presumably at the noise of the band. He was hitched to a spring wagon and was driven by Albert Smith, who is engaged at the butchers' trade in some manner or other. One of the hold-back straps broke and the horse became unmanageable and started to run. In front of Conwell's the wagon collided with another vehicle and Smith was thrown to the pavement. The



This interesting illustration appeared in the 1888 Barnum courier. The trained zebra act was presented by William Ducrow. Pfening Archives.

horse kept on running. Smith lay insensible. A crowd quickly gathered about him, and they supposed he was dead.

"The blood was flowing freely from a wound on his head. He was carried to a real estate office near by, and Dr. Alexander was summoned. Meantime Smith recovered consciousness, and wanted to go look for his horse. An examination did not develop serious injuries. There was a severe abrasion on the upper left side of the head, that had the appearance of being much uglier than it really was. The wound was skilfully dressed, and by that time Mr. Smith was himself again, and ready to go about his business.

"A colored boy who was in the wagon with him when the accident happened, was unharmed but badly scared.

"The horse was stopped by Joseph Brooks, a colored man, just as the animal dashed onto the sidewalk in front of Steinberg's clothing store. Mishap, as it was, the outcome under the circumstances was a fortunate one."

The adventures of Pat Macavoy provided the matinee audience with an un-

scheduled "Extra Performance," as the *Journal* dubbed it.

"The battle which took place at the Barnum show late yesterday afternoon, was an interesting event, though not on the bills, for the parties who witnessed it at a safe distance. Pat Macavoy, a mechanic employed on the state house, attended the show and had a leading part in the dance and fight act which took place. Pat in the first place created the impression that he was drunk, not full but replete with good humor and whiskey. He says

that he was not intoxicated, but the parties who witnessed his actions, as well as the policemen who quelled the disturbance, say that he was. At any rate his reserved seat was not as good as he had paid for and he demanded his own seat which was unfortunately occupied by other parties. He insisted on having his own seat and it is said used plain language to support his desires. He was promptly ejected out of the side of the tent and he went to the rear where four of Barnum's men were resting. Here a row started and again Macavoy received the

worst of the bargain. He then summoned some of his associates and started back to the scene of the tumult. Another row started and anybody was at liberty to participate. About a score of showmen and as many stone cutters and others disinterested but ready to fight became engaged in the affray and if it had not been for the appearance of Deputy Sheriff Ruykendall and Officers Gardiner, Ring and Buford a bloody riot would have been the result. As it ended, one showman was stabbed in the abdomen, another had his jaw broken and still another had to submit to arrest. The man was released from the county jail, however, last night, and allowed to go away with Barnum. A colored man, Minus Ferguson, was also arrested but released. A renewal of the affair was expected last night, and over a dozen policemen were deputized to guard the grounds. Nothing happened, however, and the performance passed off last night without the specialty performance of the afternoon."

Once again, as in all its Kansas dates, Barnum & Bailey's "15 New United Shows 15" played to large audiences. As the *Journal* summed it up, "It was a great show and a great day for the street car lines."

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.



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Now comes 1924, and Adam begins a life of real circus adventure by joining the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus, and now other circuses were to play a role in Adam's life.

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Now, for the first time, a full and complete story of his late wife Ann, who for forty-seven years, was a devoted and loving wife, before her passing in 1980. And now, three lonely years are experienced, as Adam describes in his book his life of loneliness, and finally, a new chapter of love and romance is to begin again at the age of seventy-five. Read the true story of love and romance that can come to one of seventy-five, when most people of this age retire quietly, as this complete story unfolds in this book.

Read about how this meeting and friendship developed though a palmistry reading of a lovely girl. For the elderly, especially, this should be an inspiring story to show that, even at seventy-five, the story is told that age in itself is not what counts, but the way we live our lives, as it is all so nicely explained in this book.

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